NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to move amendme
No. 22, in page 2, line 27, leave out subsection (7).

The First Deputy Chairman: With this it will
convenient to discuss the following amendments: No.
in page 2, line 28, leave out 'does not' and insert 'shall

No. 24, in page 2, line 32, leave out subsection (8).

No. 25, in page 2, line 33, leave out 'does not' and ins
'shall'.

No. 26, in page 2, line 33, leave out 'unless' and ins
'whether or not'.

6 pm

Mr. Fraser: This set of amendments omits the spec
provisions which are made for the City of London in t
Bill. I am not sure why they are there. I understand th
the City of London does not receive any block grant. It
affluent enough to look after itself, as well as other pa
of London.

Although it may not be of any practical importance
the City of London, the amendments raise matters
principle that we should explore. They relate to t
different views that the Government take about pub
expenditure. For instance, if a firm spends £25 milli
upon the professional fees involving a takeover, it is n
a matter of concern for the Government because that
private expenditure, with which they do not interfe

However, if a smaller amount of money is spent by a local authority on the provision of blankets or heating for the poor during the inclement weather they do need to interfere. In the same way, the Government are unconcerned that people come and go at salaries which were reported in the paper this morning of between £200,000 and £300,000 per annum. That is of no consequence to the Government because that is private expenditure, but the Government sit heavily on local authorities that employ people to look after those who are poor, deprived and need the assistance of their local authority. That difference of opinion between public and private expenditure illustrates and underlines the difference between the Opposition and the Government.

However, there is an even more bizarre example of that difference of opinion in clause 1. The Government are saying that if any local authority, apart from the City of London, uses special funds the expenditure that is saved by the income from those special funds going into the general rate account should be left out of the account altogether, but that that should not apply to the City of London.

I understand the reason that lies behind that. The City of London is enormously rich because it has accumulated funds over hundreds of years for various special purposes. Once a year, the City of London is good enough to invite Members of Parliament to discuss the way that the City of London is run as a local government unit. The City of London explains to us—I make no complaint about this — that the City's great celebrations and displays of pomp and circumstance do not cost the taxpayer or the ratepayer a penny because of the accumulated funds. The City of London must have approached the Government and asked that their special funds be treated differently from those of any other local authority. The Minister will not disagree that the result of the Bill is that the City of London is treated differently from any other local authority.

How does that work in practice? It means that if the City of London uses special funds—as I believe it does — to have a banquet at the Mansion house or to entertain the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister, a foreign statesman, or a foreign dictator at the Guildhall, as it does by tradition, and if it serves the traditional boeuf en croute or smoked salmon mousse, those matters are not of concern to the Government or matters that should be restrained by any local government legislation, and the City of London should be able to continue with that kind of expenditure untrammelled.

However, if a local authority does not want to provide banquets for foreign statesmen — least of all for the Chancellor of the Exchequer — but does, as its main priority, want to provide a meals on wheels service for the indigent people of its borough, the Government take a different attitude and say that any kind of device that a local authority employs, or any kind of creativity within its accounts, is to be dealt with by the draconian provisions of the Bill.

In the City of London there is a hands-off attitude to expenditure on boeuf en croute or smoked salmon mousse, but meals on wheels for the poor is a different matter. I have heard criticism of the use of race relations advice in Lambeth over the meals-on-wheels service to ensure that moslem constituents are not offended by being sent roast pork in their meals on wheels. That is just as ridiculous an expenditure as providing a seven-course meal for Dr. Hastings Banda.

Let us have another example. The City of London has a bridge fund. The Government do not want to interfere in the expenditure of that bridge fund. Its purpose is to replace London bridge. That expenditure on the rates has, I think, led the City of London to have an expenditure above its target and GREA. It is always top of the league — my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) says 300 per cent. — in overspending. The Government want to ignore that. But once the bridge is built and people are sleeping beneath the arches of the bridge in winter, if Southwark, on the south side of the river, wants to assist with blankets those people beneath the bridge which was built with City funds, its expenditure will be penalised under the rating system, yet it is only caring for the poor and disadvantaged of the borough.

Another example is expenditure on the Barbican. I enjoy going to the Barbican, when I can find it. I enjoy its theatre and music. I understand that much of that is also provided by special City funds. I make no complaint about the City's contribution to Britain's arts. It subsidises the Royal Shakespeare theatre and Shakespeare said that music soothes the savage breast. But there are a good many savage breasts in other parts of Britain—people who are unemployed, people who have suffered grave discrimination and people who have little chance of getting on in life. Some local authorities want to provide art at a different level for such people. They want to provide music, instruments and tuition for such people. That is lumped on to their general expenditure and can incur the penalties which are visited upon people by the rate support grant system, and that is to be treated entirely differently. One could go on.

My complaint is not about the City of London's expenditure—some of us may be a little envious of its funds—but that the Government do not judge according to need but according to affluence. They say that because the City of London has accumulated moneys, whatever the nature of its expenditure, no matter how flamboyant or extravagant it might appear to the outside world, it is not to be constrained or dealt with in any way at all under Government legislation relating to local government finance. But if, on the other hand, a borough is less affluent than the City of London, if a local government district has great deprivation, poverty and need within its boundaries but it is not an affluent borough, the Government say that borough should be dealt with in an entirely different way.

Therefore, I move the amendment not in any sense of envy or complaint about the City of London's expenditure under these circumstances, but to underline what we regard as a discriminatory attitude between one local authority and another. It is to underline that point of principle that I move the amendment today.

Mr. Tony Banks: I support amendments Nos. 22 to 26 in respect of the City of London.

The City of London already enjoys too many privileges and rights which are not extended to other authorities. I do not see why the City should be treated as an exception yet again in this legislation. I assume that the reasons are as stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser)—that the City has special cash funds and resources that place it in a different position from other

[Mr. Tony Banks]

local authorities and the Bill therefore seeks to allow the City to continue to enjoy those additional and unique funds and does not want to tax them. That is wrong.

If the City wants to remain part of Britain's local government structure, it must suffer the same problems and burdens as the rest of local government in terms of interference by the Government. The City should share the misery that all other local authorities now have to suffer as a result of Government legislation.

I have a great deal of respect for the City of London as an institution. I do not want my remarks to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. While I was chairman of the Greater London council I enjoyed a great deal of the hospitality of the City corporation, particularly the Lord Mayor and the sheriffs. It was an amiable period. One tried to reciprocate as best one could, but one could never hope to emulate the City's hospitality. Indeed, no local authority would even attempt to do so because it would be rightly castigated by its ratepayers and the press for a great waste of money. However, it is difficult when one receives the hospitality of the City to know how to respond. One perhaps should not respond by continually attacking it, but when I do, I do so as someone who believes that the City of London has no place within the democratic structure of London's local government and, indeed, local government nationally, although it has a role and a history that one must respect.

6.15 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts: Is it not the case that when a Labour-controlled local authority provides hospitality it is vilified by the media for wasting ratepayers' money, and when a radical Labour local authority gets rid of such things it is attacked for destroying the customs and traditions of the area?

Mr. Banks: What my hon. Friend is adequately demonstrating is that Labour local authorities cannot win. Whatever they do, they will be attacked and vilified by the press, egged on by the Conservative party. We understand the point. That is what offends. In many cases the press and the Conservative party are one and the same thing. However, it still offends what little sense of natural justice a Member of Parliament can maintain after three years in this place.

Effectively, the City of London exists today as an unreformed ancient municipality. It was granted privileges by King John in 1215 and until 1948 it returned its own Member of Parliament. To demonstrate the way in which it is treated as an exception in London—the Bill wants to continue to treat it as an exception—the City retains its own police force. It has its Lord Mayor and a bench of aldermen. Aldermen were abolished elsewhere in local government some years ago, I think by the legislation of 1972. That would not be so bad, but it goes much further than that. Those aldermen—there is a bench of 25—are elected for life. How can the City postulate in any credible fashion that it is a democratic structure when it still has aldermen in it who are elected for life.

It is from the aldermanic bench that the Lord Mayor is elected. Until quite recently, that bench made sure that no women were elected. Although Edwina Coven—a name remarkably like that of a Conservative Member—won elections she could not take her seat because the sexist rules of the City prevented her from doing so. That now passed, but it took until recent years for particular rule to be broken down.

I am seeking to demonstrate that the City is continu treated differently from every other local authority terms of its structure, practices and procedures and its financial accounting. I really cannot see that this defensible position within the context of Governm policy towards local government generally or in term the specific requirements of the Bill.

The matter has best been summed up by the Her commission which sat between 1957 and 1960 and stu the structure of London local government. Indeed, it the Herbert report which was used as the basis of London Government Act 1963 which set up the G These words will keep coming back because they amazing. When the Herbert commission looked at structure of London local government it said:

"If we were to be strictly logical we should recommend amalgamation of the City and Westminster. But logic ha limits and the City lies outside them."

That was a Royal Commission saying, in effect, that City was too powerful and was served by too many ve interests.

That is an amazing statement on the way in which City has always resisted the logical restructuring of l government and any changes in the way in which electoral processes of local government are administe

When we refer to the City of London many foreig and people from outside London assume that we mean the greater London area. So that hon. Members are c about it, I must say that it relates only to the square m

In the 19th century a number of Prime Minis especially Gladstone, tried to get the City of Londo assume responsibility for the whole of the wider Lon area, but it steadfastly refused to do that. I realise respect the fact that many Londoners like the C traditions, especially the Lord Mayor's show. Theref it would be unwise of a Labour Government to conf the City head on and say, "Let us abolish the Cit London." After all, we have just fought many battles abolition. That word does not commend itself to La Members in respect of local government, and it will commend itself to us when we are in power.

We must ensure that we are consistent. We have that we shall look at local government structures an objective in our assessment. When we are in governm we must not abolish the City but incorporate it so tha Court of Common Council could become in effect equivalent of the Greater London council. Each mem on it could stand as an elected member for each of London parliamentary constituencies. They would the be democratically elected for a four-year term. The b of aldermen in the City of London would be abolis along with a number of other practices.

The Court of Common Council would be made u the elected representatives from the 92 Lon constituencies who would elect the Mayor. We w retain the Lord Mayor's show, but he would be the Mayor of Greater London and could speak as the nu one citizen of Greater London. That would ultima fulfill the historic role that Gladstone offered the Ci the 19th century.

I remind hon. Members that, although at presen City only covers one square mile, it is the richest of al local authorities in London. It contributes a ma

amount to the other London boroughs and to the equalisation system. We accept that fact. The City of London has benefited disproportionately from the abolition of the Greater London council, especially where new schemes have been set up which are based on a contribution on a per capita basis because it has a farcically low number of electors. The most recent register of electors that I have comprises an electorate of 4,811. There is massive wealth in the hands effectively of an electorate of 4,811.

The City of London's ward lists record an electorate of 14,189 for the 25 wards, of which 4,760 are resident voters and 9,439 non-residents. Those lists are used when electing aldermen and members of the Common Council. The resident electorate is small. Therefore, its demands on the City's services in terms of social services, education or housing are, indeed, minute, hence the fact that the City must contribute so much to the other parts of London. We must bear in mind the fact that the City of London is surrounded by some of the poorest boroughs in London, such as Tower Hamlets and Hackney, to name but two. Hackney is the most deprived local authority area in the whole of England and Tower Hamlets comes third.

Mr. Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, to a large extent, those councils have been the victims of their own problems in that they have been most obstructive to any attempts made to try to improve the rateable values of those areas? The Government have brought forward such areas as the docklands and helped many of the London boroughs to obtain better rateable value in the future.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman's point leads on to a whole area of argument on the impact on the east end of the docklands area and, especially, its impact on Tower Hamlets. I am delighted to enter that argument if I can stay within order. Whatever additional benefit may come to Tower Hamlets or to Newham through activity by the London Docklands development corporation area, the impact on property prices has been so dramatic as to remove that area from its residents. The traditional residents, the east enders, are effectively being forced out of the east end.

Mr. Allan Roberts: It is true that the Tower Hamlets council, which is now under Liberal control, but even previously when it was Labour controlled, adopted a policy of selling estates to the private sector and encouraged—some Labour Members thought wrongly—the City to move into Tower Hamlets. The council even kept the rates down to encourage that. Tower Hamlets is one of the lowest rated London boroughs. I, as a resident there, am aware of those matters. I do not necessarily agree with those policies, but the council did that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) said.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be tempted to stray from the Common Council, which is what the amendment is about.

Mr. Banks: Whenever an hon. Member gets involved in a discussion about the City of London such matters tend to arise. The City of London is a speck of enormous affluence in a great sea of poverty in the east end. It will cause a great deal of controversy as long as it continues to exist, in terms of its peculiar position in relation to local government democracy and the inordinate concentration of wealth that it has at its disposal. The City has for many years resisted attempts to reform it by powerful politicians in this place. They do not come much more powerful than W. E. Gladstone. The City even resisted his attempts to reform its structure and its system. The City can still draw enormous power from within the Conservative party.

I know that the City is proud of saying, "We are totally democratic. We have elections and, after all, we are non-party political." That is absolute nonsense. The City is the ultimate Tory authority. It has reached a point where the Conservative party so controls everything in the City that it can declare itself to be non-political. The City has effectively made it impossible for anyone other than someone of Conservative politics to gain control in the City.

Before Conservative Members jump up and remind me, I know that there are Labour party Members on the Court of Common Council. But no one who is honest enough to declare himself as a Labour party candidate can get elected. We are discussing the most undemocratic local government institution in the country bar none. The day of the City is fast approaching. A Labour Government will adopt a solution for the City, perhaps broadly along the lines that I described a little earlier.

6.30 pm

Mr. Meadowcroft: If the hon. Gentleman is relying on a future Labour Government, the City is fairly safe.

Mr. Banks: It was not worth giving way to the hon. Gentleman to allow him to make that intervention.

An interesting report was published by the London Labour party in 1974 following the setting up of a working party. It makes extremely interesting reading and the hon. Gentleman might care to exchange notes with his Social Democratic party colleague, the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), about some of the things that he was saying at that time about the City, with which I agreed entirely. I hope that he still holds those views, but I do not know what the alliance's policy is on the City of London. I hope that the hon. Member for Woolwich is as forthright today as he was in 1974.

There is no such thing as a free lunch, although this place would believe that it has found the source of all free lunches. Someone has to pay in the end. There is no such thing as a free lunch in the City. Although the City can say that the great civic events that it provides—for example, the Lord Mayor's show and many other services—are paid for out of City cash, the moneys came from somewhere. The moneys are the product of someone's efforts, or were filched from a group of industrious workers in the City of London or thereabouts. The moneys still belong to the public. They cannot be private moneys, and no local authority can say that it has access to private moneys. All local authority resources and finance are public money by definition.

Although the City of London may be able to pay for magnificant banquets at the Mansion house and the Guildhall out of City cash, it is still using public money. If the Government are opposing the amendments because of the existence of City cash, they are wrong to do so. I shall listen with great interest to what the Minister says about the amendments I am supporting.

Dr. Boyson: I was delighted two days ago to see that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had in his possession a copy of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Mr. Tony Banks: I still have it.

Dr. Boyson: A vintage copy. I would not agree necessarily with the line that the hon. Gentleman has advanced. Indeed, I am sure that he would be disappointed if I did. He has referred to the famous free market doctrine that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Day by day I see the improvement of the hon. Gentleman, who is a regular attender of our debates. Milton Friedman's book is on my shelf, and I am sure that by now it is on the hon. Gentleman's shelf. This shows what time in the House of Commons, or advanced age as we approach it, does to us all. The hon. Gentleman has dined at the Guildhall, and I did so last night. I did not realise yesterday that I would be replying to the debate that has taken place on the amendment. I am sure that huge sums would have been paid to enable individuals to hear the speech which I delivered last night. It would seem that I have shared City hospitality with the hon. Gentleman.

I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) about local authorities maintaining tradition or destroying it. I like tradition. I would never attack a local authority or any other authority for maintaining it. I never agreed — this shows how reactionary I must be — with the destruction of the alderman tradition. Many aldermen carried out useful functions and served in that capacity for a long time. Some authorities, thank goodness, retained aldermen.

I shall not take up all the remarks which have been made about the City. It should be remembered that it brings about £7·5 billion a year into the balance of payments. That is a sum that any Labour Government would be glad of, never mind a Conservative Government. Certainly, any Chancellor of the Exchequer would be glad to have it. About 1 million are employed in the financial services sector, it being the sector that has expanded the most.

It has been accepted that the Common Council of the City of London has a number of unusual funds for historic reasons. It does not act like a normal local authority and it has taken on responsibilities that go wider than those which local authorities normally assume. The purpose of subsections (7) and (8) is to ensure that the revenue expenditure and income do not have to be shown in the rate fund revenue account. If the expenditure and income were shown there, it would have to be taken into account in calculating the Common Council's relevant and total expenditure for rate support grant purposes although it receives no RSG. In existing legislation "relevant expenditure" is defined as all expenditure falling to be defrayed out of the rate fund, and the rate fund is defined in relation to the Common Council in section 54 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 as a general rate. Thus under existing legislation only expenditure and income that is defrayed out of the general rate is taken into account for relevant and total expenditure purposes. Subsections (7) and (8) of clause 1 preserve the present position and Opposition Members know that amendments Nos. 22 to 26 would change it. I ask my hon. Friends to resist the amendment and allow the position to be left as it is.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. John Fraser: I beg to move amendment No. 2
page 2, line 36, leave out
'in relation to future years'
and add
'only in relation to the financial year 1977-78'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it wi
convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2
page 2, line 36, leave out 'future years' and add
'the year beginning in 1988 and subsequent years'.

No. 57, in clause 3, page 3, line 18, leave out 'any f
year' and insert
'the year beginning in 1988 and subsequent years'.

No. 76, in page 4, line 19, leave out 'any future
and insert
'the year beginning in 1988 and subsequent years'.

No. 186, in schedule 4, page 15, line 39, leave out
'Schedule' to end of line 45 and insert
'shall have effect in relation to the financial year beginni
1988 and subsequent financial years'.

There is a misprint in amendment No. 27. The fina
year should be 1987-88.

Mr. Fraser: I move amendment No. 27 for the pu
of introducing a discussion on the amendments tha
grouped with it. I realise that amendment No. 27 cor
a misprint.

We are dealing with emergency legislation to deal
a situation which has come to the attention o
Secretary of State relatively recently, and he mus
quickly before local authorities make decisions
rating next year. Our initial reaction was to ap
restriction to 1987-88 but not thereafter. When we ga
matter further thought, we came to the conclusion th
clause should be amended with a provision that s
apply to 1988 and future years, and I shall te
Committee why we took that view.

Clause 1 attempts to make considerable alterati
the way in which the rate fund is calculated and th
no disagreement across the Floor of the Chamber
that. The Government wish to control the rate fund
more diligently, including those items that are
debited and those that are to be credited to the rat
account. We shall debate this issue at greater length
we come to the Birmingham case and other case
know that the Government's proposals fly in the f
the advice that local authorities have received from p
auditors, including some of the largest firms of au
and accountants in the world. They fly in the face
advice that has been given to Birmingham, for ex
We know that the Government are seeking to chan
practices which have been authorised, perfectly pr
by district auditors as well as by private accountants
propose making such fundamental changes in the
which the rate fund account is calculated that we
that it is wrong that they should proceed w
consultation with those concerned.

I do not think many people would quarrel wi
proposition that there is a good deal of probit
integrity among those who deal with local ac
whether they prepare them as part of the staff
finance department of a local authority, or thos
audit those accounts. However, I am not saying tha
people should have exclusive wisdom on such matte
public have a right to know how such accounts ar

One should defer the operation of this part of
until 1988. That would allow for a year of consu
between the Government, accountants, auditors an

in local government on how matters should proceed. No doubt there is a measure of agreement about the changes that should be made to the calculation of accounts. If this amendment were passed, there would be about 12 months available to consult the various parties about the changes.

We are not proposing any different practice from that which would be followed if one proposed changing the format of company accounts, corporation tax or any similar fiscal measure. Why should local authorities be treated in this peremptory fashion when those in commerce and industry would be treated with much more consideration? There would also be more consultation with those parties than is proposed with local authorities.

I ask for this amendment to be carried so that there can be adequate consultation. Such consultation would mean that the Government could reach a decision about the proper way in which to conduct local government accounts.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I support the proposal to postpone the introduction of these rules for one financial year.

I sometimes wonder what knowledge Conservative Ministers have about local government processes. It is assumed that the proposed changes can be introduced rapidly. However, local government budgeting processes for the next financial year are well under way. That budgeting commenced in late autumn. The various spending departments have put forward their proposals and they have been considered by the finance and policy committees. The final decisions on budget will be reached shortly. Therefore, it is a devastating thing to suggest that the accounting basis on which a local authority prepares the future year's spending should be changed at this stage.

I hope that Ministers recognise that local government does not cover some small parish council but vast cities and huge counties with complex financial arrangements. It would be very difficult for local government to institute proper budgetary plans if it faced the prospect of the Government altering, in detail, its accounting processes. Any changes would abide in the next financial year. Therefore, it is perfectly logical and reasonable to suggest to the Government that, if they wish to carry the Bill in its present form, they should be sensitive to the needs of local government and avoid imposing new plans at short notice.

Dr. Boyson: The Bill is necessary because the total expenditure definition contained in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 that we presumed meant one thing turned out to mean no such thing. That is why action had to be taken and quickly. That mistake had put at risk the whole settlement.

The 1980 Act was based upon the recommendations made by the local authority associations but I do not blame those associations. Certain advice came from ministerial advisers within the Department and from the local authorities, but the local authorities were mistaken about the definition.

The purpose of the Bill is to put back the definition exactly to what was presumably meant in 1980 and had been recommended by the associations. If there had not been any doubt about the definitions, this Bill would not be before the House and we would not have the pleasure of one another's company today and on Monday.

Amendment No.27 should refer to 1987-88; there is a misprint in its reference to 1977-78. The amendment would mean that, in the years after 1987-88, we would have no means of calculating relevant or total expenditure and the rate support grant system could not be operated for those years.

The House is aware that we have had to rush through this Bill so that we can validate the methods of distribution of rate support grant to enable local authorities to receive the money from the 1 April without a challenge being put down that could stand in the courts against the basis of that distribution.

6.45 pm

Opposition Members who have been present for the debate will be aware that my—right hon. Friends and I have no love for the present system of local government finance — *[Interruption.]* We are proposing a Green Paper on the subject. Therefore, will we have the support of the Opposition?

Mr. Straw: Ministers are now saying that they have no love for the present system, as if that system had nothing to do with them. I am glad they have no love for it because it is a mess, but will Ministers have the humility to recognise that they set it up?

Dr. Boyson: Lucky is the man who has never made a mistake in his life. There have been clashes within the Labour party when some consider it has made a wrong decision.

There is a general feeling within the Conservative party that the present system of local government finance is unsatisfactory. That is why we have suggested the move to the community charge, which has met with Labour party opposition, and the centralisation of the business rate. Both suggestions are in the Green Paper. We already have a Bill going through regarding finance in Scotland and a commitment that we shall introduce a similar Bill affecting the English and Welsh rate support grant and how it is distributed. That Bill will be introduced in the near future.

Mr. John Fraser: Next week?

Dr. Boyson: No, not next week but it will be introduced, at the latest, in the first Session of the next Parliament.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Minister undertake that the Government will not abolish rates in Scotland and then seek to introduce the poll tax after the general election? Will they have the full system working before the general election so that people can decide at the ballot box whether they prefer what has been introduced or what the Government have abolished?

Dr. Boyson: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting—it is an interesting proposition—that we delay the general election for five years to enable us to vote on the working of the poll tax he may well have my support.

Mr. Allan Roberts: The Bill before Parliament will, in theory, abolish the rating system in Scotland and it should be passed before the general election. However, if the general election is called within a certain length of time after the Bill has been passed, the rating system will be abolished but no one will yet have been required to pay the poll tax or community charge. Will the Government delay the general election or speed up the introduction of the payment of the poll tax to apply a true test of which method the electorate prefer?

Dr. Boysen: Given a choice, I would choose to delay the election. That is much more attractive.

Mr. Fraser: I believe that the Minister misunderstood my question. I wanted to know whether we would have another local government finance Bill next week on grant recycling and whether it will run in tandem with this Bill.

Dr. Boyson: I am aware that there is another Bill coming forward. We shall all meet again, of that I am certain, in the House and in Committee upstairs. We can look forward to the same cast and we shall have many performances—not necessarily as many as the Windmill. I cannot pre-empt the Leader of the House or the usual channels to say when that Bill will come forward. I know that there is great zeal on the Labour Benches for that Bill to be introduced, but I must not be distracted any more by interventions from Labour Members.

It is impossible for the systems that we prefer—centralised business rate and community charge—to be brought in before the next general election. That is why we have to introduce this measure, which will validate existing practice. That is what we are doing throughout. Amendments Nos. 25, 57, 76 and 186 would mean that the new provisions will not apply to 1987-88. Amendment No. 27 would mean that we could not make any reports and supplementary reports for 1987-88 using current practices on total and relevant expenditure. The result would be chaos for local government, so I urge hon. Members to reject the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means: I will call hon. Members who are rising. Perhaps I should remind the Committee that it is not in order to cover ground that has already been covered in the debate on the amendments.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): If I trespass on that ruling, Sir Paul, I am sure you will tell me. I want to refer to exchanges between myself and the Secretary of State in the debate on Monday on the first group of amendments in relation to the powers of the Secretary of State over the courts. I submit, Sir Paul, that any matter covered in that debate which was not satisfactorily concluded because of differences of opinion must, under the rules of the Committee, be in order now. In particular, I draw your attention to the exclusion of clause 6(4) which was considered with the first group of amendments.

On Monday the Secretary of State intervened in my speech and said;

"I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here when I spoke to the amendment, but, even if he was, he does not seem to have heard me. I think that, if he had listened, he would agree that he has the wrong brief." — [*Official Report,* 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 657.]

I went on to make some remarks to which the Secretary of State obviously took exception. I have read the debate several times and I wish to respond to what the Secretary of State said. What I wish to say may overlap some of the points of order that were raised earlier today. I apologise to the Committee for not being here but I was upstairs at the time chairing a Select Committee.

There are three strands to the Bill, as is recognised by everybody—validation of previous practice into statute, further measures in respect of rate limitati restriction of court jurisdiction. I have sent a lett Secretary of State setting out the points that I bringing to the attention of the Committee. The S of State must reply to those points at the end of th at a future date or by letter. I am glad to see the assenting to that.

On the first point, the validation of previous in statute, we all agree that that is necessary statement to the House on 16 December, the Sec State made it clear that that was what the Bill about. He said that it would

"validate for England and Wales all past decisions the use of relevant or total expenditure and allow to be properly taken for the remainder of the pre support grant system, in line with the practice hitherto been adopted." — [*Official Report,* 16 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1051.]

I emphasise the last words.

When we came to it, the Secretary of Stat admitted in the debate on Monday that there addition to that. He said:

"I plead guilty, if guilt is involved, in that the further than pure validation in regard to rate limit [*Official Report,* 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 640

So we have a second element in the Bill which doe restore the status quo ante but sweeps away the w of negotiation and determination which h embarked on with several local authorities.

The third element, the one where I differ mos with the Secretary of State, is on restrictions jurisdiction. The Secretary of State says that beca cases are still to be concluded on the basis of t it stands, but not after the Bill gets Royal Assent, that it is necessary, in respect of the measures c the validation procedure, to ensure that the dete of the court will be consistent with the law as it w the Bill becomes an Act, rather than with the stood when the case was being heard. He seek that change by clause 4(6). That provision ne prospective, as well as retrospective, since i possible for a judgment to be made before or af Assent. However, it has further consequences reduces the effective power of the courts over m would have been justiciable even if no fault had b in the legislation. Secondly, it applies to a range in the additional provisions of the Bill. retrospective aspects that are unacceptable.

In respect of the matters to whose ado Secretary of State pleaded guilty we have p jurisdiction as well. I accused the Secretary o court-capping in that he was covering not only where hearings are completed but in which no has been made, but future cases. Clause 6(4) clause 7 and to schedule 2 which covers the authorities for which complicated formulae a That stems from the additional powers that the of State requires. Of course, there could be li respect of those.

Determination and notification are very imp clause 6(4) the Secretary of State rules out anyth will have a contrary effect on such notific determination. By putting clause 6(4) into the saying that his executive power will be w jurisdiction of the court because the words effect" do not have an obverse effect but an effe

from the notification and determination by order or by whatever executive means the Secretary of State wishes to use.

The Secretary of State clearly thought that I was wrong in what I said on Monday. I am justifying and showing the Committee where I think he is wrong. In the closing part of that debate a remarkable exchange took place between the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The Secretary of State had talked about retrospective powers for the courts. I interrupted to remind him that it was to be a matter of prospective executive limitation of the courts as well. In reply he said:

"Therefore, any concept that there can be a challenge to decisions in the courts is a challenge to Parliament because Parliament will have enacted the legislation and these will be the provisions."

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury rose immediately and said:

"Any subsequent challenge to the designation or rate capping of a specific authority would be a challenge not to Parliament but to the exercise by the Secretary of State of general powers that are given to him by this statute and, in part, included in schedule 2, which does not specify individual authorities, except in a number of specific cases. It does not specify actual figures but it specifies formulae that will be subject to a report or an order to be tabled by the Secretary of State giving his administrative decision." — [*Official Report*, 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 671.]

It is therefore clear that the Secretary of State is indeed taking unprecedented executive powers by virtue of clauses 4(6) and 6(4). The Secretary of State does not know what is in his own Bill or he does not know the British constitution or, conceivably, he knows neither.

7 pm

As I understand it—it has not been challenged—the liberty of the subject in this realm depends partly on the separation of the powers of the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Once the Executive begins to encroach on powers of judicial determination which are properly those of the judiciary, it is taking the judiciary's powers as well as its own.

I have telescoped somewhat the terms of the letter that I have written to the Secretary of State, but I think that I have incorporated all of its essentials. I hope that the Minister for Local Government will feel able to reply. The Secretary of State is wrong in terms of the constitution. He is wrong to take powers which he must not and should not have if the liberty of the individual and corporate subject is to be protected.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Although it is quite true that the more objectionable clauses which insert wholly new matter into local government finance come later, there are aspects of clause 1 which make it unacceptable. If we were simply making the law what we thought it was, we would accept clause 1, but subsection 6(b) goes way beyond what is required to validate the existing law. It is a catch-all subsection and makes the clause unattractive.

The Government are saying that they made a mistake and that they are determined to get the law right. In so doing, however, they have inserted subsection (6) which means that it will not be possible for local authorities to conduct their business legitimately and properly in terms of their powers and their constitution as corporate bodies.

We object to other aspects of the Bill, but on those grounds we would not want clause 1 to be incorporated into the Bill.

Dr. Boyson: I shall be brief because we have spoken at length on the amendments.

I have listened to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). His letter was delivered today, I believe, and I have a copy of it with me. I believe that a reply, which will be with the hon. Member shortly, is being prepared. What he has said is fairly technical, but clause 4 is substantially involved.

Clause 1 requires local authorities to keep for the financial year 1987-88, and in all subsequent financial years, a rate fund revenue account. It provides for certain items of account which must be included in the rate fund revenue account and provides that expenditure and income debited or credited to the accounts that are listed in schedule 1, or to any other account specified by the Secretary of State, should not be debited or credited to the rate fund revenue account.

The rate fund revenue accounts that we are requiring will be similar to, if not the same as, the traditional non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts which authorities have kept until now. As I have said, we shall keep the present system as far as possible.

The rate fund revenue account is fundamental to the method of calculating total and relevant expenditure as laid down in clause 1. I hope that the Committee will accept the clause.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend, the Member for Newham, North-East——

Mr. Spearing: Newham, South.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Keir Hardie's old seat.

Mr. Straw: And also the area where my mother was the headmistress of a school, so I ought to remember it. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) have made our objections to clause 1, and we shall divide the Committee.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Some of us feel that clause 1 must be part of the Bill. I fully support what my hon. Friend the Minister said.

I referred on Monday to the Audit Commission report on the London boroughs. It speaks of bad management and poor industrial relations. There is a need for proper accounting procedures in many Labour-controlled authorities, especially those which have been criticised often in the House, which cover 5·8 million people.

The problems were described in the *Evening Standard* of 2 December under the heading, "London is going bankrupt." The article said:

"London is heading for bankruptcy, the head of the local government finance watchdog warned today".

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: Poor management and bad control over expenditure are at the root of those comments. The vast majority of local authorities do not need the clear guidelines that are laid down in clause 1.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: Many Labour-controlled authorities need it spelling out. People who expect local authorities to collect and spend money responsibly will respect that point of view.

[Mr. Hind]

Housing has been mentioned. Some authorities are not collecting money from their tenants. Liverpool has arrears of £7·5 million.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I am finding it difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is saying to clause 1. He must speak to clause 1.

Mr. Hind: I apologise if I have drifted. The structure that clause 1 lays down is badly needed in many local authorities because of their failure simply to collect the rent. In June last year, Southwark had arrears of £24 million.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Sir Paul. The clause does not relate to housing accounts. The hon. Gentleman referred to housing accounts.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I shall give the hon. Member an opportunity to relate his remarks to the clause. I am sure that he will do so.

Mr. Hind: I shall follow your ruling on this matter, Sir Paul. Deferred payments have enabled local authorities to get around the structures of the previous legislation. Again, this needs to be sorted out. We do not wish to saddle our children with burdens caused by the inefficient, poor management of Labour authorities who borrow money today. Money should be properly collected. Lambeth Council has 64,000 unprocessed housing benefit claims, and 923 are more than three years old.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member again. This is not a general debate; it is a clause stand part debate. The hon. Member's remarks must relate directly to clause 1.

Mr. Hind: Proper accounting practices are required. Many local authorities do not follow proper accounting practices. It is necessary to impose them upon them. For that reason, I welcome this clause.

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 224, Noes 190.

Division No. 64] **[7.10 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir A
King, Roger *(B'*
Knight, Greg *(D*
Knight, Dame J
Latham, Michae
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenn
Lightbown, Dav
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fa*
MacKay, Andre
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson,
McQuarrie, Alb
Malone, Gerald
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Car
Maude, Hon Fr
Mawhinney, Dr
Meyer, Sir Anth
Moore, Rt Hon
Morris, M. *(N'h*
Norris, Steven
Peacock, Mrs E
Pollock, Alexan
Portillo, Michae
Powley, John
Rifkind, Rt Hon
Rippon, Rt Hon
Roberts, Wyn *(*
Roe, Mrs Marie
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Sackville, Hon
Sainsbury, Hon
Sayeed, Jonath
Shaw, Giles *(P*
Shaw, Sir Mich
Shelton, Willia
Shepherd, Rich
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trev
Smith, Tim *(Be*
Soames, Hon N
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Do*
Spicer, Michae
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan
Stewart, Andre
Stewart, Ian *(H*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thom
Sumberg, Davi
Taylor, John *(S*
Temple-Morris
Terlezki, Stefa
Thomas, Rt Ho
Thompson, Do
Thompson, Pa
Thorne, Neil *(I*
Thornton, Mal
Thurnham, Pet
Townsend, Cy
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenz
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, R
Wakeham, Rt
Waldegrave, H
Walker, Bill *(T*

Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Neillist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the
Schedule 1 agreed to.

Clause 2

RATE FUND REVENUE ACCOUNTS: FURTHER PROVISIO

Mr. Allan Roberts: I beg to move amendment No
in page 3, line 6, leave out second 'the' and insert 'a

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it wil
convenient to take the following amendments: No. 3
page 3, line 6, after second 'practices', insert
'(which may be practices which are alternatives to each o
which authorities may elect to use and which have
approved by an authority's auditors)'

No. 35, in page 3, line 6, leave out from se
'practices' to end of line 10 and insert
'to be observed in compiling accounts at the date the del
credit is to be made.'.

No. 36, in page 3, line 6, after 'practices', insert 'fo
time being'.

No. 37, in page 3, line 7, leave out
'for the year beginning in 1986'.

No. 38, in page 3, line 8, leave out from 'items' t
in line 9.

No. 39, in page 3, line 9, leave out from 'accoun
end of line 10.

Mr. Roberts: The title of clause 2 is
"Rate fund revenue accounts: further provisions"—
an ominous title. The fact that the title is ominous
one to inquire in some detail about the implications
clause, especially in the light of the fact that its prov
follow those in the 13 pieces of local goverr
legislation to deal with housing and local goverr
finance which have been introduced by the Goverr
since 1979. We have been promised a 14th only next
The Government have still not got it right.

I want to know when reading
"Rate fund revenue accounts: further provisions",
what those further provisions are. The histo
legislation under this Government has been one of

[Mr. Roberts]

to impose central Government's will on democratically elected local government to force them to cut services and make people redundant and one of central Government taking powers to interfere even in the minute details of local government finance and the way in which local authorities organise their accounts and financial affairs. This clause is no exception. The amendments try to do something about that.

We are again considering "proper practices" — the new concept dreamed up by the Government to enable them to impose their will on the way in which local authorities keep their accounts. Not only the whole of local government, whether Conservative, Labour or alliance authorities, but professional people involved in local government finance — auditors and others — are worried about this.

The Government's stated purpose in clauses 1 to 3 is to change the method of calculating relevant and total expenditure for rate support grant purposes to bring the law into line with the practices followed since 1981. The Minister has again spelt that out. Transfers of cash from the rate fund revenue account to other accounts or special funds are classed as expenditure and transfers from such accounts back to the rate fund revenue account are classed as income.

However, clause 2(4) goes well beyond that purpose, just as every aspect of the Bill goes beyond the purposes that the Government claim for it. It gives the Secretary of State unfettered powers—once again—now and in the future to specify what will count as income and expenditure for rate fund revenue account purposes. The Government are taking unto themselves, outside Parliament's control, the power to specify what will count as income and expenditure for every local authority. As we heard in the previous debate, that includes giving the Secretary of State the power to look at the smallest type of account kept by local authorities as well as the rate fund revenue account.

One of the creative accountancy devices that local authorities have used commonly in recent years, rightly, to keep their expendiure above the level required by the Secretary of State while avoiding massive penalties — there is nothing wrong with that as long as it is within the law—has been the transfer of money to special accounts for use in special years. It is good housekeeping to save up this year so that one can spend the money next year. If a householder did that, the Prime Minister and the Minister would compliment him on being prudent and on thinking of the future, but if a local authority does that it will now be penalised. This subsection could be used to block off those devices, prevent local authorities saving for the future and could force authorities to impose massive rate rises, if they can, or, if they are rate-capped, to make cuts.

7.30 pm

The powers that are sought in the subsection go well beyond the stated intention of the Bill and the Government should come clean about the legislation and admit what they are doing. This is another piece in a long line of 12 pieces of legislation to control and to take more powers over local government. The powers are subject neither to parliamentary scrutiny nor to consultation with authorities. We were at least given those a previous Secretaries of State for the Envirc they passed their rate-capping and other leg

The powers are left totally at large and i whether internal transfers of cash from accou are caught by the procedures specified in cla clear that transfers of cash from an external rate fund revenue account are caught in tha Secretary of State says they are.

The legislation does not just validat happened in the past. It alters the way in happened because it gives the Secretary of St alter the practices of the past and to p authorities from taking advantage, as they ha to in the past, of those transfers, which were l been validated, but which will now be made Secretary of State so determines, not if P determines. On Second Reading, the Under State for Scotland hinted that some inter "may be caught". However, it appears tha transfers will be caught, if the Secretary of St

Income from external sources to the rate account often emanates from sources that ma in professional accountancy terms, as capita There are a number of different professional that issue. The power that the Secretary of S under clause 2(4) holds out the possibility of unlawful only a certain number of the practices that are currently used. That is ba because it is unclear from the Bill what use will make of those sweeping powers. By mini many local authorities could be deprived of n of pounds of revenue income. If the Secretary total discretion, and if past performance is a on, he will deprive Labour local authorities pounds of income and turn a blind eye to local authorities, or even to some hung Labour local authorities in areas in which son Friends have marginal seats. The Minister clear assurances as to how that power will b

Amendments Nos. 33, 36, 38 and 39 deal concept of "proper practices", which will be u Ministers to interfere in even more deta authority financial activities. The amendm restore some discretion to local authoritie believer in local government and in the need be able to alter the nature of and the way i local authority is run by voting in a local el support the amendments. We are restoring local authorities in relation to accounting pr are heavily circumscribed by clause 2(3). Th fails to give a fair definition of "proper pra

My hon. Friends and I have asked the Mi five times, in Committee and on Second Read the words "proper practices". We still have that definition. The subsection still fails to definition, although it seeks to describe thos being applicable to the entry of the sort o expenditure that the Bill requires to be char rate fund revenue account. What on earth do The Government should clarify the mean practices, and our amendments give the Gov opportunity.

The amendments would also broaden the cover any practices applicable for the time entry of items of account into such a fund. In

local authorities would be allowed to continue acting, in the same way as in the past, which has been legal and proper, and which internal and external auditors have already validated. That would give local authority treasurers some opportunity to exercise professional judgment in the application of accounting practices in areas that are covered by the Bill.

Amendment No. 37 is significant because it would remove the retrospective element from the definition of "proper practices". Retrospective provisions and retrospective legislation are, all other things being equal, bad legislation. If the legislation validated the previous custom and practice as legal—as everyone believed—and merely corrected that, as my hon. Friends and I have said earlier, there would not be a problem. However, it does not. The retrospective elements concerning the definition of "proper practices" introduces an entirely new concept.

At present, clause 2(3) applies the rather vague definition of the practices as being

"for the year beginning in 1986"—

or, in other words the financial year 1986-87. Amendment No. 37 would remove those words, with the result that the definition of requirements flowing from it would take effect from the date of Royal Assent. Therefore, the retrospective nature of the legislation would be removed, without any detriment to local or central Government.

We do not see any reason why there should be retrospection when it is not necessary, or even why it should be applied at all. It is not designed to prevent the retrospective validation in law of what has happened, nor does it alter the difficulties that central and local government now face in paying out rate support grant if the Bill becomes an Act. On the contrary, it seeks to further certainty in local government finance by preventing the retrospective application of proper practices. The authority requirements of clause 1 are intended to take effect from 1987-88 onwards. The Government should explain why those proper practices should take effect from 1986-87 when there is no need for the entirely new concept that has nothing to do with validating what has previously happened.

Opposition Members, and, I am sure, some Conservative Back Benchers, are amazed at the nature of the legislation and at the outrageous statements that Ministers are making to justify it. Ministers have staggered from one disaster to another. Unless they take on board the intent of our amendments and accept some of the constructive points made by Opposition Members, and if the legislation reaches the statute book without serious amendment, Ministers will be setting themselves up for another series of disasters and will be in the same difficulties in future as they are now.

As I have said, that all goes to prove that central Government cannot run the affairs of local government as well as the locally elected councillors and their chief and other officers.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I shall concentrate briefly on two amendments in this group. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) that amendment No. 37 contains no requirement whatever for retrospection. The subsection concentrates on the issue of proper practices, which seems to be an obsession with the Government. As there is no requirement for the validation of the £70 billion of local government expenditure to have retrospection in relation to proper practice, I accept the terms of amendment No. 37.

One issue that has been hardly touched on by hon Members either on Monday or today is that the professio of the auditor appears to be called into question by the wa in which the Government have presented the legislation In that context, amendment No. 34 is extremel important. I have a high regard for the internal audit o local government. In my time in local government, I hav known many auditors employed by the local authorit who exercised their authority to point out bad practice and to ensure that they were rectified without fear o favour from departments within the local authority.

The provision also demeans the practice of extern auditors. It does not matter whether they are profession or district auditors: the fact is that the external audit local government is held in high regard and should not b diminished by the Government's proposals.

The way in which the Government take powers themselves says to auditors, "We do not trust you and w alone will be the arbiters of what is proper practice; we w set the one route down which you must go." It is sayi to the external auditors, "We do no even accept your hi standards."

As I said in an earlier debate, the distinction betwe what is legitimate accounting, which seems to make t cost advantageous use of local authority resources, a what I would regard as improper practice, is whether course of action can be sustained within the policies of t Government of the day. If it cannot and it has to rescued by some future Government, then I would rega it as improper. The interesting thing is that case after c that has fallen into the latter category has been picked by external audit. It is not something that has been hidd It has been pointed out, and some cases have gone to courts. The report to which the hon. Member Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) referred, however badly incorrectly, has come into the public eye. It was hidden.

The present practices and methods of audit have served to expose that which ought to be exposed. Ther no necessity for the proposals on proper practice in cla 2. That is why amendment No. 34 is important. It acce the professional standards of the auditors and says t there can be alternative practices, as long as they approved by the auditors. That is where the responsibi properly lies. It should not lie prescriptively with Government to say that there is one narrow road d which we must go and that there is no diversion fro Therefore, the important aspects of this group amendments are that they remove retrospection, whic not necessary, and trust the powers and professi standards of the auditors.

Mr. Pike: These amendments are important. They to bring the position as close as possible to that whic understood to be in existence prior to the legislation b introduced. The way in which the clause is worded c lead to a retrograde step. It challenges not only political judgment of local authorities, of whatever p but the professional judgment of officers, whether the executive officer, the borough treasurer, the internal system or, as the hon. Member for Leeds, West Meadowcroft) pointed out, even the external audit sy It is left solely to the Government to decide what

[Mr. Pike]

determine to be "proper practices". I wonder why we should believe that the Government are the only people who have the ability to determine what is proper practice. It is the wrong direction in which to be moving.

7.45 pm

The phrase "proper practice" appears in the clause on several occasions. It is very vague and does not say what the Government mean. However, we know that the Government are trying to prevent what they see as creative accountancy. However, creative accountancy has come into being only because of the actions of the Government and the way in which they have dealt with local government in recent years. I have been connected with local government for many years in one way or another. Ten years ago the phrase "creative accounting" had not even been heard of. I am sure that many people who served on local councils never got to know what the phrase meant.

I have always accepted that, at the end of the day, the Government have the right to determine how much money they are prepared to give to local government. I believe that the House and local government have the right to argue about whether that amount is sufficient to meet the needs of local areas. I believe that the Government have gone wrong by failing to make sufficient money available. I accept, although I do not like it, that they have the right to determine that figure. However, they have tried to deprive councils of the freedom to raise locally what people are prepared to pay in additional income to the council to enable it to provide the services that are required.

I believe that when councils provide the necessary services they are looking responsibly at the needs and requirements of the communities they represent, whether that be domestic ratepayers, industry or commerce. All councils know that if their areas are to survive they must maintain industry and commerce. No council puts up rates deliberately to punish industry or anybody else. Domestic ratepayers have a direct say in whether they are satisfied that the council is doing its job correctly and meeting the needs of the community.

As councillors we found it difficult every year. We knew what we wanted and needed to do to meet the needs of the community, but that had to be balanced by what we could do and by what we could ask the ratepayers to pay. If the clause is not amended it will limit the power of councils to try to get the best possible deal for the people they represent. It is the duty of councillors, from whichever party, to do their best for the people in their communities. That is not only the responsibility of the councillors, but it is the task of the officers. As long as councils work within the law and are acting in the interests of the community I believe that they will be using "proper practices" to protect the interests of those they represent.

While I was the leader of the council I had to take the chairmanship of the local authority finance committee for a year because the chairman of finance became the mayor of the borough. We set up a fund to finance a project to convert an existing listed building next to the town hall into an arts centre and theatre. That opened last year. The officers said to the leaders of the council that if we put a certain amount into a special fund we would incur penalities because we would spend more than the Government would permit. However, they said that we would receive grant at a higher level then the penalties. Therefore, we decided to put money into the fund because that was in the best interests of the people we represented. I am sure that the Minister will say that we were wrong to do that. However, I would argue that we were acting in the best interest of the community by putting the money to one side, benefiting the ratepayers in future years by the equivalent of a penny rate.

If the clause stands in its present form, I am sure that the Government will be able to decide that what we did was not proper practice and that it would be outside the provisions of this legislation. That is just one example. I could give many others, but I do not intend to do so because we wish to make progress.

If the Government are not prepared to accept one or more of the amendments and to try to move in the direction that we seek, it will be yet another blow to local government, another restriction, another limitation on the ability of local authorities to meet the requirements of the people whom they represent. At the end of the day, it is local government that knows what is best for the people in the area. Before 1979, the Government said that they would give freedom to local government, which has been referred to many times in earlier debates. Everything that the Government have done has been in the opposite direction.

We believe that local authorities should have more powers and the ability to finance what they do, although I accept that, while we may argue strongly about the figure that the Government say they are prepared to put in, the Government have the right to determine exactly what they wish to pay. The clause should not remain as drafted. It was unnecessary for the Government to draft it in that way to deal with the problem that has arisen as a result of their own legislation. The Government are wrong, yet once again they are striking a blow at local government.

Mr. Clelland: It is not only unreasonable and unfair but unnecessary for the Government to impose these further restrictions on local authorities. After all, in their accounting practices and finances, local authorities are more open than any other organisation, probably including even central Government. Local government accounts can be scrutinised by electors and auditors. They are run in a professional manner by the treasurers and finance officers who are responsible for them. Therefore, one must ask why the Government feel it necessary to introduce the concept of "proper practices" into rate support grant law.

We know that "proper practices" are already exercised by the auditor, or at least he has to see that the authority has observed proper practices in compiling its accounts, but apparently the Government now wish to apply the concept also to rate support grant law. It is not as if that was the only thing that the Government were doing. Apart from imposing the concept of proper practices in the clause, they intend to provide the Secretary of State with yet more power to specify expenditure or income that is to be regarded as of a revenue nature. Thus there is a double-pronged attack on local authorities. The Opposition think that that is unnecessary. The Minister should explain the necessity for the provision, if the Government feel that it is necessary.

A full explanation would be appreciated, particularly in the light of the Government's record of explaining their

decisions. The Minister will recall that I have had considerable correspondence with the Department about the reason why Newcastle city council was refused disregards. I appreciate the reply that I received yesterday to a letter that I wrote to the Department in October last year. The reply has taken a long time to come to me; it arrived yesterday and tells me no more than what the Minister's predecessor told me, which is that the Minister will not tell me anything. If that is the practice that will be adopted, not only will local government have to observe proper practices that are not defined, but it may not even be given an explanation of why it is in breach of proper practices that were not defined in the first place, after the Minister imposed them. That is the ridiculous maze that local government finance is entering.

I support the amendment. I hope that, in his reply, the Minister will explain to the House a little more fully exactly what the proper practices are intended to be.

Mr. Tony Banks: I wish to speak to the various amendments on proper practices. I should like, first, however, to take the opportunity to correct something said by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) when he spoke in the clause stand part debate. It relates to the financial practices of local authorities. He said that the Audit Commission chief, John Banham, had suggested that Labour local authorities in London were heading towards bankruptcy. In justification of that accusation, he quoted a story in an edition of the London *Evening Standard* in December. He could have gone on to quote a story that appeared on Sunday in the *Sunday Telegraph*, a newspaper that I have been keeping about my person since the debate started, drawing some comments from the Minister for doing so.

We must get the record absolutely straight. The stories that have appeared in the Tory newpapers such as the London *Evening Standard* and the *Sunday Telegraph* bear little relation to what John Banham actually said. We know that the stories are all part of the generalised Tory onslaught on Labour local authorities. In particular, inner London Labour-controlled authorities have found themselves virtually sinking below the financial waters because of Government policies, loss of rate support grant and so on—all the things that we keep discussing in the House. In various ways they have tried to mitigate the impact of Government policies, and in doing so have become involved in several accounting practices that the Government now wish to proscribe.

It must be said that none of the things that local authorities have done in creative accounting have been declared illegal. That is the important point. It is the Secretary of State's practices that have been effectively declared unlawful or illegal, hence the need for the Bill. Before one starts throwing accusations around about the special accounting practices of Labour-controlled authorities, one should bear it in mind that at no stage has anyone been able to say that those are illegal practices.

Following the story that appeared in the London *Evening Standard*, councillor Margaret Hodge, who chairs the Association of London Authorities, wrote to John Banham and asked him for his comments. The hon. Member for Lancashire, West used the comments in the London *Evening Standard* as a rerun of his speech on Second Reading and of that which he delivered on the first day of the Committee stage. He has only one speech, and I suspect that we shall hear it time and again before we reach the end of the Bill.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The hon. Gentleman has only one speech.

Mr. Banks: My speeches vary.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Only marginally.

Mr. Banks: My speeches vary in content and pitch, and in the general level of boredom, hysteria, humour, intelligence or whatever, so at least I can say that I vary the pace somewhat. But the hon. Member for Lancashire, West has a line and he sticks to it. He ain't ever going to give way to anyone. He is deliberate in his policy. Obviously, he pursues a policy of cerebral hygiene. He does not want to be given information, so he ploughs on. I am prepared to give way to any Conservative Member who wishes to intervene.

I return to the article that the hon. Member for Lancashire, West quoted from the London *Evening Standard* and the comments ascribed to John Banham, the chief of the Audit Commission. Mr. Banham described the report as "inaccurate", and said:

> "My paper made it clear that the commission was not in favour of privatisation as a universal prescription.
>
> At no time did I suggest that there was any possibility of local authorities in London or anywhere else becoming technically bankrupt.
>
> Indeed I made the point explicitly that borrowing ratios in local government were relatively modest by private sector standards."

That is what John Banham said in response to the stories that appeared in the London *Evening Standard*. Some hon. Members might have heard the erudite speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall, who probably has a far greater grasp of economics than anybody else in the House. He made precisely the same point. The Secretary of State laughs. He is not the person to go around bragging about his economic prowess. I suggest that if he wants to challenge my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall to a debate about economics, he will get the whipping of his life.

8 pm

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to what Mr. Banham said and the correction that he made. The hon. Gentleman is also aware that I am no lover of the line purveyed in this Chamber regularly by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind). Does he accept that Councillor Mrs. Hodge has also written a long article in the current edition of *New Socialist* in which she refers explicitly to the accounting practices of Islington and makes the point very straightforwardly that unless a future Labour Government were to do something retrospectively about money, the so-called dented shield that she and her colleagues in the Labour party have been urged to hold up would be unable to survive? The accounting practices in Islington have fallen on the wrong side of the division to which I referred earlier and cannot be sustained within the philosophy of the Government of the day. To my mind, therefore, they are improper.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman is correct in part. Local authorities that have attempted to defend jobs and services—they are probably the most hard-pressed local authorities in the country—have been caught up in a major problem. In attempting to defend jobs and services

[Mr. Banks]

they have involved themselves in financial accounting practices that would be difficult to sustain if there were another Conservative Government.

Labour local authorities, in particular Labour local authorities in London, are doing certain things upon the assumption that there will be another Labour Government. I do not believe that the structure of local authority finance can survive another Conservative Government. Those local authorities have taken a risk. It is a high risk strategy, but it is justifiable in terms of what they are seeking to do. I am very honest and straightforward about what is going on in local authorities in London, and their high risk strategy requires a Labour Government. If we do not have another Labour Government, local authority finance will be destroyed. It will be the Government's baby.

I have suggested that we should say to the Government, "It is impossible for us financially to manage this local authority; the Government must now take over the running of the local authority so that the people in the area will see who is truly responsible for the impact on the services within the area." One of the problems that the dented shield philosophy poses for Labour authorities is that they are blamed by the local electorate for the decline in the standard of services, although the blame should be laid firmly at the Government's door.

Mr. Ridley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and the leadership of the party to which he belongs have made it clear that they will not bail out the Labour authorities? It is indeed an extremely high risk strategy. If it is not right for the Labour party to bail out these authorities, why does the hon. Gentleman suggest that the Conservatives should bail them out? If all parties—including, I believe, the party of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft)—are of this opinion, the risk is so high that it must have been absurdly reckless to undertake it.

Mr. Banks: No, I do not agree. It does not greatly surprise me that my views and those of my hon. Friend on the Opposition Front Bench are different. I am not aspiring to high office. Therefore, I can preserve the degree of personal candour that perhaps cannot be retained by others—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I make that point in a friendly and amicable fashion, but I can stand up and speak my mind in this place without fear or favour.

It is not a question of bailing out the local authorities. I understand that a Labour Government will restore the relationship between centrally funded services and locally funded services. They will return the rate support grant to the point where it bears some relationship to the position that existed before 1979. That would solve the majority of the financial problems that are now faced by Labour local authorities.

It goes much further than that. Labour local authorities are not involved merely in trying to get round this or that specific Act in terms of their accounting practices. They also have to deal with the impact on their local communities of central Government policies across the whole spectrum. For example, the Government's economic policies have a major national impact on unemployment.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The clause relates to accountancy methods, not to how the money is counted. We are now talking about the amount of money and how it is distributed. We ought to return to the clause.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for Newham, North West (Mr. Banks) is now suggesting that a future Labour Government would restore rate support grant to the 64 or 65 per cent. level of 1979.

Mr. Banks: It was 61 per cent.

Mr. Ridley: Very well, 61 per cent. I could not remember the exact figure. I wonder whether the Opposition Front Bench would confirm that suggestion. It is important that the local authorities should be aware of precisely what the position is.

The Chairman: Order. Important though it may be, I do not think that its importance is related to the substance of the clause that is before the Committee. I hope that we shall return to accountancy.

Mr. Banks: Indeed, Mr. Walker. I am exploring the areas of broader concern and interest in order to explain why local authorities have become involved in special accounting practices. I take your point that that relates to counting the money. However, one needs to know how much money one has before one starts to allocate it. Local authorities find that they do not get the same sort of money as they used to get from central Government. I am as interested in the reply to that question as is the Secretary of State: whether the next Labour Government will be taking rate support grant, in terms of central Government contribution, back to the percentages that were achieved during the period of the last Labour Government. I shall willingly give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) if he wishes to confirm the point.

I rose merely to correct a very misleading newspaper story that was quoted by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West. I am afraid that it will be necessary on a regular basis to correct the distortions of Conservative Members about the policies and the financial practices of Labour local authorities. They are staying within the law. That is why the law keeps being changed. If the local authorities were acting unlawfully, the district auditor would be able to move in on them, the ratepayers would be able to take them to court and they could be accused of not fulfilling their fiduciary duties in respect of rate-borne expenditure. None of that has happened. It is the Secretary of State, not Labour local authorities, who is in the dock. Therefore, it is absolutely misleading and incorrect for Conservative Members to start pointing the finger at Labour local authorities when the real lawbreakers, the real recidivists, are sitting on their own Front Bench tonight.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): We have had two debates on this group of amendments. The latter debate, initiated by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), gave us a fascinating and candid insight into the debate taking place in the Labour party about the extent to which inner London councils run by that party are already bankrupt or about to become bankrupt, and about the extent to which any future Labour Government would be prepared to bail out those councils. We have already heard about the philosophy of the dented shield. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) ought to reply to the debate and I hope that in due course he will have

opportunity to explain where he stands on the important issues raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West.

Probably much less interesting to hon. Members but nevertheless important for people outside who are trying to follow the proceedings on this Bill has been the main debate on this group of amendments which was initiated by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). I noted that most of his remarks were addressed to clause 2(4) which is the subject matter not of this group of amendments but of the next group. For that reason I hope that he will forgive me for not replying in detail to the points that he made. He said that clause 2 was ominous. It is ominous only to someone who does not understand it. With the indulgence of the Committee, I shall read some quite lengthy notes on what clause 2 is all about.

These amendments relate to the rate revenue account, and it may assist the Committee if before dealing with the detail of the amendments I explain the general approach that we are adopting in the Bill to the rate fund revenue account.

Clauses 1 and 2 of the Bill set up in statute the rate fund revenue account for the purposes of the new statutory definition of relevant and total expenditure which is in keeping with the current approach that in practice we have adopted for relevant and total expenditure. Although not required to do so by statute, local authorities have in general kept an account of their main revenue transactions —an account which has often been known as the rate fund revenue account. Current practice on relevant and total expenditure, as distinct from the statutory provisions in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, has been to calculate relevant and total expenditure by reference to these traditional rate fund revenue accounts, Therefore, the provisions in the Bill, which are designed to maintain the status quo on relevant and total expenditure, introduce into statute the concept of the rate fund revenue account.

I must stress that this concept is introduced solely for the purposes of providing a statutory definition of relevant and total expendiure. It is not an attempt to control local authority spending, nor is it an attempt to regulate local authority accounting. As mentioned in earlier debates in Committee, my right hon. Friend already has powers under section 23 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to make regulations about such matters as the form of accounts and statements of accounts. I remind the Committee that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, Countryside and Planning, when he was Minister for Local Government, announced on 28 February 1986 that we had decided not to make new regulations on local authority accounts, but to invite the local authority associations in conjunction with the Audit Commission and accountancy bodies to set up their own arrangement for dealing with accounts. This remains the Government's position, and I am pleased to tell the Committee that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy together with officers of the Audit Commission have now prepared a draft code of practice on local authority accounts on which they are currently seeking comments from local government and other interested parties.

The provisions of the Bill are designed so that the statutory rate fund revenue account which authorities will be required to keep for 1987-88 and subsequent years will be very similar, if not the same, as the traditional non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts which authorities have in general been keeping. The starting point is that in clause 1 the rate fund revenue account is identified as the account to which all revenue expenditure and income must be debited or credited — with the exception of that revenue expenditure or income which is properly debited or credited to certain other accounts. The revenue expenditure and income to be excluded is not simply that which is properly debited or credited to any other account kept by the authority, since expenditure and income included in memorandum accounts — such as the account for section 137 expenditure — should also be included in the rate fund revenue account. This is the way the non-statutory rate fund revenue account has traditionally been kept. The main accounts, the expenditure and income of which are to be excluded from the rate fund revenue account, are specified in schedule 1. The power for my right hon. Friend to make specifications under clause 1(6)(b) will enable us to cope with any other such accounts, including any such accounts established by local Acts.

8.15 pm

In addition to revenue expenditure and income, other items of account can be included in the rate fund revenue account, such as contributions to special funds or certain capital expenditure, where this conforms to proper accounting practices. Clause 2 provides that these practices are any practices drawn from the practices applicable to the traditional non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts in 1986-87, but taking into account variations in practice occurring from time to time. I should say something about proper practices. Local authorities prepare their accounts according to proper practices and a local authority's auditor is required to satisfy himself under the Local Government Finance Act 1982 that proper practices have been observed in the compilation of the accounts. These practices are not set out in statute, and accountants and auditors—in particular the professional accountancy institutes—have developed, and continue to develop, accounting practices which are considered proper for local authority accounts. The Bill does not specify precisely what the proper practices are. As I have already made clear, it is not our intention to interfere with local authority accounting. Clause 2 of the Bill provides that the practices to be applied to the statutory rate fund revenue accounts are those applicable in 1986-87 to traditional non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts, but will take account of variations of practice occurring from time to time.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Has the Minister seen the draft code prepared by CIPFA? It looks at the points that we have been debating about the difference between reserving money and providing for committed expenditure. The Minister talks about things being included in the rate fund account and ordinary practice, but they are already contained in the code. I am baffled as to why he has to go through this great rigmarole when what has been proposed and sent out for consultation covers the points that he is making.

Mr. Chope: I shall come to the point about why it is necessary to set out in this clause the relationship with proper practices. I have not read the detail of the substantial volume that has been produced as a code of

[Mr. Chope]

proper accounting practice. If in this clause the Government were defining one sort of proper practice and saying that no local authority could adopt any other practice, perhaps even one which had hitherto been regarded as proper, then local government would have cause for complaint.

In order to emphasise that the status quo has been maintained we say that anything which has been proper accounting practice can be taken into account. We say that when the authority compiles its rate fund revenue account for 1987-88 it can select such practices as it considers appropriate from the body of practices that were applicable in 1986-87. That is why amendments Nos. 33 and 34 are unnecessary. I ask the Committee to reject them.

Allegations were made that amendments Nos. 35 to 39 were sinister because they were retrospective. I hope that I can demonstrate to the Committee that the only way in which they are retrospective is that they refer back to proper accounting practices being used at present. If we do not refer back to those practices it is hard to know what they are when we talk about defining them in the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 35 to 39 seek to remove any connection between the practices to be used for compiling statutory rate fund revenue accounts with the practices applicable in 1986-87 to non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts. The result of that would be that the practices to be used for compiling the new statutory rate fund revenue accounts would merely be practices properly applied to that new account.

As the statutory account is a new entity, no one would know what these practices are. The point that the Opposition have made is that by the issue of these accounts we are creating a situation whereby local authorities will not know where they stand. If the amendments proposed by the Opposition were to be passed, local authorities would indeed be able to complain that they were in the dark, because no one would know what the practices were.

If the statute is to provide for the new rate fund revenue account to be like the traditional rate fund revenue account, we must refer to the practices that apply to that traditional account. This is best done by referring to the practices that are applicable to the traditional non-statutory accounts kept for 1986-87, which is the last year before authorities are required to keep the new statutory accounts, and take account of variations in practices occurring from time to time.

This is a complicated subject, but it has been made more complicated by the failure of Opposition Members to understand what it is about, and their attempts to raise the spectre that this is introducing something sinister. This clause is designed to help local authorities prepare for the new definition set out in this Bill, and I hope that the Committee will reject the amendments.

Mr. Allan Roberts: What a tangled web we weave. The purpose of this complicated legislation, in the words of the Minister, is to enable local authorities to know where they stand. The Minister's explanation was about as lucid and illuminating as the clause itself. If, after reading it in *Hansard* and studying the clause, local authorities know where they stand I shall be amazed.

In this clause, the Secretary of State is taking po unnecessarily to legislate retrospectively. As he i interfere in the day-to-day detail of local auth accounts this complicated plethora of measures is ne to hedge everything about, to make this or that acc clear, to put in to legislation, so that the Governmen validate their own mistakes, what local authorities do anyway. The clause and speech of the Minister hallmarks of the Government's approach to government. All of this is needed because the Govern have decided that they can run local government b than the people who know their own communities who are accountable to their own electorate.

We shall not push these amendments to the vote Minister has attempted to some extent to explain wh Government mean by proper practices. He has said local government is carrying out proper practices. I is so, why do we need this legislation? We need detailed, interfering legislation because the Govern want to control the details of local government interfere. I honestly believed, when some Conserv said that they did not believe in bureaucracy, that meant it, but I am beginning to doubt that.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Straw: I beg to move amendment No. 40, in 3, line 11, after 'any', insert 'initial or intermediate'

The Chairman of Ways and Means: With this it w convenient to take the following amendments: No. page 3, line 11, after 'year', insert

'commencing not less than twelve months after the d specification.'.

No. 42, in page 3, line 11, leave out subsection (4 insert—

'(4) The Secretary of State may specify in respect initial or intermediate year, kinds of expenditure or i from an internal source which are to be regarded a revenue nature for the purpose of debiting or crediting of account to a rate fund revenue account.'.

No. 43, in page 3, line 11, leave out subsection

No. 45, in page 3, line 12, leave out 'are to' and 'in his view should'.

No. 47, in page 3, line 14, at end insert

'and a local authority shall have regard to any specif made under this subsection in determining whether or debit or credit items of account to its rate fund r account'.

No. 49, in page 3, line 14, at end insert

'but any such specification shall not override any deci a local authority as to any expenditure or income regar it as of a revenue nature for such purpose where that d is in accordance with the practices mentioned in subsect above.'.

No. 50, in page 3, line 14, at end insert

'and any authority shall have regard to any such advic the Secretary of State in determining the form in wh maintain its account'.

No. 53, in page 3, leave out line 16.

No. 56, in clause 3, page 3, line 46, at end inser

'commencing not less than twelve months after the specification'.

No. 73, in page 4, line 14, at end insert

'commencing not less than twelve months after the specification.'.

New clause 6—*Consultations*—

'No specification under section 2 above shall be before the Chartered Institute of Public Finan Accountancy and the local authority associatio consulted.'.

Mr. Straw: These amendments relate to the powers of the Secretary of State to specify income and expenditure items. The amendments seek to circumscribe the power given to the Secretary of State in clause 2(4) to specify the kinds of income or expenditure that are to be regarded as revenue for the purposes of the rate fund revenue account. Some authorities fear that that power may lead the Secretary of State to take measures by use of the specifications to restrict special accountancy techniques to maintain spending levels.

Ministers have come to Parliament over the last couple of years and given notice that they consider that a particular arrangement should no longer apply. I recollect that that was the case with section 7 of the Rate Support Grants Act last year. As I recall — I stand to be corrected — we did not object to that clause. Do the Government intend — the Minister can inform us when he replies — to deal with special or creative accountancy techniques? I hope that the Minister will make that clear, because, while he may take exception to some of those techniques, they have been accepted by auditors and the district auditor as legitimate in the past, and it is important that authorities should understand their position.

The problems of local authority accounting techniques have changed in the last seven years. They have changed out of all recognition, not just because of the cuts in the absolute level of rate support grant from 61 per cent. to 47 per cent., but because of the impact of target and penalty and the penalty-related block grant that authorities receive.

Once they spend over a certain level they get less rather than more. That has meant that what is brought into account on the revenue side in any given year is of far more critical importance to its revenue than it ever was in the past, when the amount of grant that they received was only broadly related to their expenditure, as was the system before 1980. Marginal changes in given revenue expenditure did not produce the dramatic differences in income through block grant that the system now produces. I hope that the Minister takes that point on board. It is the introduction of these penalty systems — not just the changes of absolute income — that has led authorities to search for other devices to transfer revenue expenditure into forms of capital expenditure.

Amendment No. 41 would impose a 12-month period on any specification issued by the Secretary of State. That is to enable local authorities to have some warning of the terms of any changes in the rules — a point that I have just referred to. It is important that authorities are given breathing space and given notice of the effect that new technical accounting specifications may have on their levels of real income, and therefore expenditure.

Amendments Nos. 45 and 49 would remove the mandatory nature of a specification by the Secretary of State, and in its place he would be entitled to issue advice, which local authorities would have a duty to regard. The Minister will recall that when he was a humble Back-Bencher during the course of proceedings on the Local Government Bill in 1985 there was a lengthy debate — I think it was that Bill and not one of the other endless pieces of local government legislation to which it has been my lot to devote the last four years — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has done very well.

Mr. Straw: I wish to place on record, for the avoidance of any doubt, that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, West (Mr. Banks) says that I have done well. I take the compliment in the manner in which it was intended.

We have had many discussions about the nature of a "have regard" duty upon authorities. It is not a light duty. It may not be mandatory, but if anybody ignores a duty to have regard to some requirement in the law, that is actionable. An obvious case is the "Highway Code", to which every driver must have regard, and the code which will be provided at some stage under the Local Government Act 1985.

8.30 pm

A "have regard" duty under amendments Nos. 45 and 49 would not make the Bill unenforceable, but would provide some flexibility so that authorities would have regard to what the Secretary of State was asking, but they would, at the margins, be allowed some freedom of choice in allocating, for example, financial transactions between capital and revenue spending. However, if they went beyond that margin, their decision could be challenged by the auditors and ultimately in the courts.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has tabled amendment No. 48, but that has not been called so I shall deal with the other amendments. Amendment No. 49 would provide an opportunity for councils to resist a specification. Councils would not be obliged to regard a specification as overriding where their previous decision on whether an item of expenditure or income was revenue was in accordance with the proper practices as defined in the Bill.

Amendment No. 50 would preserve Ministers' opportunities to make specifications, but would only require a local authority to have regard to any specification in determining what to count against its rate fund revenue account.

New clause 6, to which the hon. Member for Leeds, West will no doubt address himself, is designed to provide for consultation with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and local authorities. He will no doubt also wish to speak on amendment No. 73.

To return to the point that I made at the outset, all of us wish to see local authority accounts, as with company accounts or any other institution's accounts, in proper order. There is a clear distinction between some capital expenditure and some revenue expenditure. A major housing scheme is plainly capital expenditure. Refuse services are plainly a revenue expenditure. However, many items of expenditure do not have a clear dividing line. For example, at what point does a repair to a property become a major repair which enhances the capital value of a property and could reasonably be regarded as capital expenditure? There are many other areas in which there should be some flexibility.

There is also the matter of into what year certain expenditure should be put. Again, local authorities should be allowed some discretion in that matter, just, as the Minister will know, people who pay tax under schedule D are allowed some discretion, particularly on the opening and closing of a business, as to which year income should be brought into account.

We seek to improve and to introduce greater flexibility into the scheme proposed in clause 2.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I want — as my warm-up man, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), said earlier —

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

to comment on amendments Nos. 56 and 73, in my name and the names of my hon. Friends, and new clause 6 on consultation.

The first two amendments deal with timing. Those of us who are worried about local government structure and methods of working are anxious to protect the integrity of local government and to assist it to make the changes which will be forced on it by the Bill. I am surprised that the Minister, who has had a long career in local government, is not prepared to accept the need to move slowly from one system to another. There is no way in which it is possible for local authorities suddenly to switch course in midstream and to change their accounting practices — to change the way in which they organise their rate fund revenue accounts. There is no way that they can accommodate such matters simply by diktat overnight. It is arrogant of the Government to say that they do not care about that and will simply order that it be done.

Our amendments, like some of those moved by the hon. Member for Blackburn, seek to say that, if the Government are to force this measure on local government, at least they should give some breathing space during which time local government can organise its accounting practices to cope with the pressures created by the Government. If adequate time is not given to local authorities to make such changes, there are likely to be problems within local authorities, not caused by some malevolent view from within local authorities, but caused by the pressures put on them to make the changes too hastily. We are talking about bodies which spend vast sums of money and employ large numbers of people. Therefore, it is important to make sure that they can carry out such changes in their practices and that due regard is taken of the time it will take.

New clause 6 on consultations is straightforward. The Bill, as now drafted, has consultation with local authority associations written into it. The new clause seeks only to put into a particular part of the Bill, and also to include in the consultation written into the Bill, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. I think that there is a misspelling but that is of no crucial importance. It seeks to put CIPFA into that process as a body specifically engaged in accountancy and the practice of accountancy within local authorities. If we do not recognise the status of the profession, we do a disservice to the whole practice of local government. Therefore, it is our wish to write into the Bill the principle of consultation with local authority associations at that point, together with CIPFA. I hope that the Minister, with his experience of local government, will accept the new clause.

Mr. Chope: Amendments Nos. 40 to 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 53 and 56 all relate to clause 2(4). They all seek to modify or delete the provisions in the Bill relating to my right hon. Friend's powers to make specifications that certain kinds of expenditure and income are to be regarded as of a revenue nature and hence are to be included in the rate fund revenue account unless they should be included in accounts referred to in schedule 1 or specified under clause 1(6). I recommend that all the amendments should be rejected and it may assist the Committee if I explain the background to clause 2(4).

The purpose of these powers is to enable my rig Friend to specify that some item of expenditure or i is of a revenue nature where there may be some dou example, all rate income is normally credited to t fund revenue accounts which authorities traditional kept. We might wish to see that practice continue though it might be argued that that part of rate used to pay for capital expenditure is not of a r nature. In those circumstances, a specification m made stating that all rate income is of a revenue We would need to do this for each year for whi intended that further supplementary reports sho made, as well as for 1987-88 and subsequent year

The powers of clause 2(4) do not permit my rig Friend to specify that some item of expenditure revenue—that is, that it is capital—nor do they for specifications about items which are not expe or income, such as transfers between accounts. I ca the Committee that my right hon. Friend has no in of attempting to say that something is revenue wh whole world thinks is capital.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister explain the exam he gave a moment ago — I realise that it is technical—of expenditure that is paid for out of fund in support of a capital scheme? Did he say t would count as revenue or as capital? How wo specification work in those circumstances?

Mr. Chope: I said that if rates were levied to f capital project, it might be argued that the ra income of a capital nature. That power would en Secretary of State to specify that all rate income revenue nature.

We propose to make specifications simply to doubts in such a way as to ensure that all new s rate fund revenue accounts will be in the form i authorities have kept their traditional revenue ac urge the Committee to reject these amendments.

We are also debating amendment No. 73 clause 6. Amendment No. 73 would prevent making specifications in relation to total expend 1984-85 to 1986-87 in Wales and for 1983-84 to in England and for 1987-88 in both countries. To the status quo, we need to make specifications years that will reflect directions we have made expenditure under the existing statutory provi 1986-87 and previous years. I therefore recom Committee to reject amendment No. 73.

Mr. Tony Banks: Would a local authority have to the courts for a decision taken by the Minist this subsection of clause 2?

Mr. Chope: This clause does not restrict the rig individuals to seek their remedies in the courts have always sought to do and regularly do. Norm courts decide that the Government have exerci discretion reasonably and properly.

New clause 6 would add CIPFA to tho consulted before a specification is made under cl That would be inappropriate. Although I reco professional expertise of CIPFA, that institute represent the local authorities that are affected grant. The authorities and their associations necessary expertise to respond to any consultati

matter. Moreover, the consultation provisions in the Bill relating to specifications are in line with all the other consultation provisions relating to rate support grant.

We would not wish, nor is there any need, to change well tried precedents. I recommend that the Committee rejects new clause 6.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Allan Roberts: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 3, line 16, at end add—

'An item of account shall not be held to be contrary to law for the purpose of section 19 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 by reason only of its being debited or credited to any account of a local authority where by virtue of this section it is required to be debited or credited to another account of that authority.'.

I shall speak briefly about amendment No. 54 as it relates back to a previous debate about what the Government are generally trying to do in this clause. This amendment is designed to give protection to local authorities that continue to make up their accounts in ways other than those prescribed in the Bill. As the Minister has already said that the legislation is not intended to do anything but prescribe what is already local authority practice, there is no reason why he should not accept this amendment, which writes his statement into the clause.

The provisions in the clause are mostly unnecessary, except for the validation of previous practice that has been deemed to be unlawful. As we have said, the provisions are necessary only because the Government now have, and want even more, detailed control of local authority expenditure.

8.45 pm

We want to know what is wrong with the present position—what is unlawful in items of local authority accounts and why the legislation is necessary. The law is clear, and deals with the misuse of money. Without this legislation, expenditure may have been unlawful because the local authority had no statutory power to incur it or because it was incurred as a result of an abuse of discretion. A particularly fine distinction in law has already been drawn between items of account that are on their face unlawful and those items that the council may lawfully incur, but which in a particular case might be tainted by illegality. An example is Beacham v. Metropolitan Auditor in 1976, where the Divisional court upheld the auditor's refusal to declare unlawful the expenditure incurred by an authority for demolishing some buildings, notwithstanding the argument that the demolition had required planning permission that had not been obtained. The court held that an item of account would be unlawful only if, by law, it should not have appeared in the accounts. That is an item of expenditure that the council has no power to incur.

The present position is that an item of account need not relate only to expenditure; it may be an item of either expenditure or income. An item of income might be unlawful because, for example, it came from an illegal source or it was for an illegal purpose.

If there are any "crooks"—the word used by the Conservative party chairman on television last night—in local government or in the City of London, they should be brought to book and prosecuted. Labour Members are totally against people behaving illegally and corruption in local government. The Labour party has more to lose from corruption and inefficiency in local government because it is the party that believes in local government, public expenditure and local authority public services. Therefore, we believe that such things should be adequately and forcibly dealt with.

We do not understand why the present law needs amending. What is wrong with the present definition of legality and illegality? We should like to put into the legislation protection for local councillors and local authority officers to carry on with the accounting practices in the way that they have done according to the current law of the land. As the Minister said previously that the Government's intention is to allow existing practices to continue, that must be in keeping with the thrust of that argument. I commend the amendment to the Minister.

Mr. Chope: I hope to persuade the Committee that the amendment is unnecessary. In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts)—if it is unnecessary there is no harm in including it—I must point out that if we were to include it, it would make things worse for local authorities. The amendment seeks to provide that where an item of account is debited or credited to an account contrary to the provisions of clause 2, it is not to be held contrary to law for the purposes of section 19 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982.

Section 19 of the 1982 Act is all about ultra vires expenditure — surcharge and disqualification. It deals with those circumstances where an authority has incurred expenditure without the power so to do, or which it has incurred through an abuse of its powers by acting unreasonably.

I am advised that reference to items of account that are contrary to law under section 19 would not include references to items of account that have simply been debited or credited to a different account from that to which statute provides they should have been debited. Accordingly, as I have said, the amendment is unnecessary and I recommend the Committee to reject it.

Were the amendment to be carried, it would cause problems because it would suggest that any other expenditure that should have been shown in some other account, such as an account under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, would be contrary to law for the purpose of section 19 of the 1982 Act if not shown in that account. I hope that with that explanation the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Allan Roberts: As none of the amendments has been accepted — and, therefore, the clause stands unamended—I urge the House to reject the clause. As I said in my opening remarks,

"Rate fund revenue accounts: further provisions"

still sounds ominous, despite the Minister's attempts to reassure us. The clause still contains major pieces of retrospective legislation that we believe to be unnecessary. It introduces new provisions as well as validating past practices. It still includes the provision of extra powers that the Secretary of State will be able to exercise dictatorially without the scrutiny of Parliament and without consulting local authorities through their associations or individually.

These powers are being given to the Secretary of State in a clause that we consider to be bad legislation. This proposed legislation seeks to enshrine into law more

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

powers to enable the Government to be involved in the detailed running of local authorities' internal affairs and internal accounting procedures. The clause is opposed by Labour in local government, by alliance councillors, independent councillors and, even more significant for the Government, by Conservative councillors and those who help the Conservative party in local government through their local authority housing associations.

Beyond that, the clause is opposed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and by others who are involved professionally in dealing with local authority accounts. In short, it is bad legislation. It flows from previous pieces of bad legislation, and this is the 13th Local Government Finance Bill that the Government have introduced. At each stage, they have assured us that their purpose is to clarify the law in protecting local government and simplifying procedures for it. At each stage, however, the law has become less clear, more complicated, more bureaucratic and more centralist. Clause 2 is no exception to that process.

We tried to amend the clause in a way that would have prevented the need to vote against it. Our amendments sought to give more rights and freedoms to local democratically elected councils. We sought to amend it in a way that would prevent state interference with one of Britain's finest democratic institutions — local government. Our intention was to amend it in a way that would make retrospection unnecessary. If our amendments had been accepted, it would not have been necessary for Ministers to say, "We are seeking to set out in legislation the good practices that local government already observes." Local government follows those practices and has done so for many years.

If these good practices exist, why do we need to introduce bureaucratic legislation on to the statute book? Unfortunately, it is necessary to take that course because the Government find themselves in a mess through their own desire to interfere. They wish to cut services and to cause local authorities to make their employees redundant. The Government find themselves in a mess because of their attempt to reduce services and public expenditure through cutting local authority expenditure. They have had to erect a panoply of legislation to enable them to interfere.

The clause will not clarify the issue, nor will it simplify it. If it becomes part of an Act, it will prove to be as unworkable as every other piece of local government legislation that the Government have introduced. Every piece of their previous legislation has been circumvented because of local government's ingenuity. As that has happened at every stage, the Government have introduced another Bill, but local government chief officers and treasurers have been able legally to defend jobs and services in their areas. They have circumvented previous legislation and they will circumvent the Bill. Further legislation will be needed, especially as the Bill has been hurried and is ill thought out. It is not understood even by the Secretary of State for the Environment, let alone by local government. I hope that the Committee will reject the clause.

Mr. Chope: I hope that the Committee will allow clause 2 to remain in the Bill. It is an important clause. I note that the Opposition did not have the courage of their convictions to call a Division on any of their ame Perhaps they were not quite sure whether any of t adequate.

Mr. Allan Roberts: If we receive challenges of we shall vote on every amendment. We are well a the Government have a majority, that the Go Whips are on and that the payroll vote is in the Commons. By voting against the clause standin the Bill, we are dividing on a matter of principle hoped that by reasoned argument we would per Government to accept some of our amendment

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend the Chancel Duchy of Lancaster has pointed out to perhaps——

Mr. Walter Harrison (Wakefield): On a point Mr. Walker. If the Minister wishes to chall Opposition, we can divide on all our amendm every Government amendment. The ability to d illustrated in 1971, and that illustration can be If the Minister provokes the Opposition, he will irrespective of what the Opposition Front Bench the Minister know that.

Mr. Chope: I would not wish to pick an argun someone who has had the experience of Opposition Deputy Chief Whip. I am advised by hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lanca perhaps the Opposition have not voted amendments to clause 2 because they do not h troops here. I do not know whether there is any that piece of advice.

The clause, along with clause 1, introduces int the concept of the rate fund revenue account relevant and total expenditure can be defined i and the new statutory definition is that which in has been adopted since 1981.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the B

The Committee divided: Ayes 240, Noes 178.

Division No. 65]

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Brinton, Tim
Alexander, Richard	Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Brooke, Hon Peter
Amess, David	Brown, M. *(Brigg & C*
Ancram, Michael	Browne, John
Ashby, David	Bruinvels, Peter
Aspinwall, Jack	Bryan, Sir Paul
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*	Buchanan-Smith, Rt H
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*	Buck, Sir Antony
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*	Budgen, Nick
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Bulmer, Esmond
Baldry, Tony	Burt, Alistair
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Butcher, John
Batiste, Spencer	Butterfill, John
Bellingham, Henry	Carlisle, John *(Luton*
Bendall, Vivian	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lin*
Benyon, William	Cash, William
Best, Keith	Chapman, Sydney
Bevan, David Gilroy	Chope, Christopher
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Churchill, W. S.
Blackburn, John	Clark, Dr Michael *(Ro*
Body, Sir Richard	Clark, Sir W. *(Croydo*
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Ru*
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Colvin, Michael
Bottomley, Peter	Conway, Derek
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Cope, John
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Corrie, John
Boyson, Dr Rhodes	Couchman, James
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Crouch, David
Bright, Graham	Currie, Mrs Edwina

Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gailey, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Malone, Gerald
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ryder and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter

Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*	Spearing, Nigel
Prescott, John	Steel, Rt Hon David
Randall, Stuart	Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Raynsford, Nick	Stott, Roger
Redmond, Martin	Strang, Gavin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*	Straw, Jack
Richardson, Ms Jo	Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*	Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*	Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Rogers, Allan	Torney, Tom
Rooker, J. W.	Wainwright, R.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*	Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*	Wareing, Robert
Rowlands, Ted	Welsh, Michael
Sedgemore, Brian	White, James
Sheerman, Barry	Wigley, Dafydd
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.	Williams, Rt Hon A.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth	Wilson, Gordon
Shore, Rt Hon Peter	Winnick, David
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*	Woodall, Alec
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*	Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.	
Skinner, Dennis	Tellers for the Noes:
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*	Mr. Allen McKay and
Soley, Clive	Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

Meaning of local authorities expenditure

Dr. Boyson: I beg to move amendment No. 58, in page 3, line 19, leave out from 'year' to end of line 20 and insert—

'*(a)* reduced by the aggregate of the credit items of account for the year, and

(b) adjusted by making such additions or subtractions (or both) as are specified in respect of the year concerned by the Secretary of State.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this amendment it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 59 to 63, 65 to 67, 74, 89, 150 and 152.

Dr. Boyson: These are amendments to the power of my right hon. Friend to make specifications in relation to relevant expenditure. They bring this power into line with the power to make specifications on total expenditure in clause 3(7).

It may assist the Committee if I indicate how we intend to use this power of specification. First, my right hon. Friend intends to make specifications so that relevant expenditure in future will be in essence the same as it has been taken to be in the past. That is, relevant expenditure will be broadly the net expenditure of an authority, excluding certain items such as mandatory student grants which are financed by specific and supplementary grants, rate support grants, rate or precept income, and balances.

Secondly, we intend that specifications should provide that, when an item of account has been entered in the rate fund revenue account contrary to proper practice applicable to that account, it is excluded from relevant expenditure. The amendments are necessary to deal with that latter point.

These matters have not arisen with the existing statutory specification in the 1980 Act because the statute does not refer to accounts or accounting practices although, in practice, we have operated as if it did.

Under our current approach, if we considered that total expenditure, and hence relevant expenditure, which authorities submitted to us improperly omi account, or improperly contained such an i adjust the submitted figures after giving th opportunity to comment on what we prop

Thirdly, we intend to make specification authority includes in its rate fund rev transactions that involve putting more mon funds, and if there is no specific liability aga money is being provided — what we co deficit financing of special funds—the tra be excluded from relevant expenditure ar expenditure.

If we had not been advised that our ger to total and relevant expenditure was incor would have sought to exclude such transact figures of expenditure submitted by authori our normal practice of dealing with figures to my right hon. Friend to be improperly

Under the powers that we are now takin deal with all such situations by means of should add that, before making specificati hon. Friend will consider carefully all of t tions that he receives and consult when he do so. To make specifications here, his po to be exercised in accordance with principle applied to all local authorities.

Any decision to make a specification mu in accordance with general and admi principles, so the Secretary of State unreasonable decisions. His decisions will to the courts.

Mr. John Fraser: The central objection to that Parliament is seeking the power to should or should not go in or out of a loc account, as we have to concede that Par powers from time to time to regulate th accounts. I have referred frequently to th Acts. There is no disagreement in that objection is that the power to determine w omitted from or included in a local autho account is to be specified by the Secretary Minister made no secret of that. However things which I welcome.

First, the Minister said that, when mak tions, he would consider representations relevant authority. I take it that he wil assurance that, when he makes any genera about what should be included in or omitte authority's account, he will consider the repr local authorities generally, as expressed by l associations. It would be helpful if the Min to give an assurance that general represent received in addition to the representations th referred to.

The second assurance that the Minister ha the principles on which the specifications ar be general, and will not differentiate authorities. We understand that future dec challengeable in the courts. I am sure that i chose to discriminate between one authority the courts would not be slow to interve principles of administrative law. It will perhaps the Minister will reply construct Minister will accept an amendment on Repo incorporate the obligation to consult to whic

adverted. If he is willing to do that, it will go at least some way towards assuring local authorities that they will be consulted about these matters and will not be dealt with differentially.

9.15 pm

Mr. Dobson: I should be grateful if the Minister will answer some questions arising from the probing Opposition amendments. I should like clarification from the Minister, particularly in view of his earlier interest in education, of the status of payments made and income received by education authorities when they provide education for pupils from other areas. Will the Minister give us some information about the income that the Inner London education authority receives from, say, the London borough of Barnet, which is represented by the Prime Minister? In 1986, the parents of 780 children so recognised the superiority of the education provided by the Inner London education authority that they sent their children from Barnet to Inner London education authority schools. Even allowing for those who go the other way, there is a net inflow of 332 children from Barnet schools into ILEA schools. Is that income reckonable and does it fall within clause 3 as a credit item?

If the Minister thinks that I singled out the borough that the Prime Minister claims to represent, where parents overwhelmingly voted with their children's feet to get a better education from the Inner London education authority, he might prefer to look at the example of the London borough of Brent, part of which he claims to represent. Before any of the Minister's more ignorant hon. Friends suggest that the London borough of Brent was Labour-controlled, I remind the Minister that, in 1985, when the London borough of Brent was Tory-controlled, no fewer than 1,924 children from the London borough of Brent were sent by their parents to Inner London education authority schools because they recognised the superiority of the service that the Inner London education authority was able to offer at that time.

I shall be grateful if the Minister will tell us exactly what will happen to the income that will accrue to the Inner London education authority in those circumstances. I hope that he will persuade one or two of his colleagues, should any actually turn up for the debate, to recognise that parents, particularly those in the outer London boroughs and the overwhelming majority living on the borders, recognise the superiority of the service provided by the Inner London education authority, despite the adverse publicity that he, his hon. Friend, the London *Evening Standard* and other obnoxious journals constantly pump forth.

Mr. Hancock: I should like the Minister to clarify the point raised by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on Government amendment No. 58. This set of Government amendments gives the Secretary of State enormous powers. I believe that local government is worried about the proposed change. The Bill as it stands allows the Secretary of State to exempt items from the expenditure of a local authority, if he wishes. These provisions allow him to add items, if he wishes.

Many local authorities, for various reasons, run reserve funds which come within the categories covered by schedule 1. It could be a vehicle reserve fund, in which the local authority saves money to buy new vehicles, or a general reserve fund. My local authority of Portsmout has a reserve fund. It would be worried if a Secretary State had the discretion in one year to add its reserve fun to or exempt it from the general way in which i expenditure is reckoned for rate support grant in subsequent year.

Will local authorities be treated differently? Many ho Members and I fully accept the Government's fear of th creative accounting that has taken place. Many peop believe that this will lead to problems when loc authorities are finally brought to book and made account in real terms. Many local authorities are afra that items over which they have little control will be adde to or exempted from their accounts. They may have gre difficulty, therefore, in operating their budget for th coming year. Will the Secretary of State have th discretion to pick on a particular local authority and p it in this category?

I should be afraid if the Committee supported th Government's amendments. Many questions arise as what can and what cannot be covered. I am concerne about the discretionary power being wheeled in, somewh like a guillotine, whenever it suits the political climate. I read the legislation correctly, it could lead to th Secretary of State inflicting a mini-budget on a loc authority half-way through the year and suddenly addi an item that had not previously been included. That mu send shivers down the spines of many local treasurers, not local councillors. The legislation gives enormo powers to the Secretary of State and we are entitled to full explanation of how it will operate and exactly what will cover.

Dr. Boyson: I shall try to deal as adequately as I ca with the important questions that have been raised on th technical matter. If I cannot deal with all the questions, shall write to the hon. Members concerned.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Norwoo (Mr. Fraser), I give the commitment that the loc authority associations will be seen. Further, I can say th decisions will be challengeable in the courts. I therefo give affirmative answers on those two points.

If I could have the attention of the hon. Member f Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I shall answer h points.

Mr. Dobson: I hang on the hon. Gentleman's eve word.

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I tru that he is still doing so when I have finished speaki about the matter which he raised.

There is much movement of children between o authority area and another in London. I do not want make a party point, but I must say that the movement children out of Brent has increased greatly. For two a a half years the Conservative party had control over Bre with the Liberal party. But the movement out of Brent h occurred before then. Next week, I shall find out t movement from ILEA to Brent and Barnet. I trust tha shall be able to get the figures to send them to the ho Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. I know that he a seeker after truth.

Mr. Dobson: On the assumption that the hon. Doct is a seeker after the truth, why did only 1,783 come in

[Mr. Dobson]

ILEA schools in 1982 and why did the number increase to 1,924 after the Conservatives and the alliance had been in charge in Brent for two years?

Dr. Boyson: As I said to the hon. Gentleman, I shall look at the figures. I have not the slightest doubt that those figures are correct. However, I shall consider them.

The hon. Gentleman must remember that ILEA schools were built up to a high standard. I served as a headmaster in ILEA schools for 14 years. Therefore, I can see both sides of the issue. However, the hon. Gentleman would probably not have appointed me had I applied when he was the chairman of the governors. My school was the most over-subscribed in London, and still has the longest waiting list in London. Therefore, I am aware of the movement between schools.

I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's word when he speaks about education, but I shall consider the figures and pass them on to him because I know that he would like to have them, and so would I.

This year, 25·6 per cent. of children in Brent are going to independent schools or to county schools elsewhere in London. That is a very large figure and it is four times the average for London.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the status of the recoupment passing from one authority to another. I must advise the hon. Member that in 1980 I took a Bill through its Committee stage which gave parents more choice of schools and gave them the right to cross boundaries. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman should worship at my shrine. The ingratitude of the hon. Gentleman is like a charcoal biscuit—it is very difficult to absorb. I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to join my party immediately although, obviously, he should be influenced by that fact.

The expenditure on recoupment payments between Brent and ILEA, or between ILEA and any of the London education authorities, would come from the rates fund revenue account for Brent and it would be income for ILEA. That is the way in which the payments would move between the two bodies. The expenditure would come out of the rate fund revenue account for Brent and would be counted as income for ILEA. As I have said, there is much movement in London between one authority and another.

A moment ago I knew the answer to question raised by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), but it has just slipped my memory for the moment. I shall include it in one of my later answers to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hancock: The question referred to the reserve funds operated by many local authorities, and whether those funds could and would be brought in and out at the Minister's discretion, and how those reserve funds would be allowed to operate in those local authorities in years to come and whether that discretion would be reflected across the board or whether individual local authorities would be picked out.

Dr. Boyson: I presume that that would apply to all authorities and it would actually count as a special fund. Obviously, we have had to legislate identically for all authorities. The legislation is difficult enough now without discriminating between one local authority and another.

Mr. Hancock: The way in which the provision is worded at present, especially with amendment No. 74, gives, if I am reading it correctly, the M ability, if he so desires, to say, for exam city council, "You must include, in thi expenditure any reserve fund that However, at the same time, if I am rea and the amendment correctly, he could push that same commitment on other lo must watch that ability to choose a consider whether it covers, for exampl that many local authorities operate.

Dr. Boyson: The reserve funds wi funds. I shall check and write to the ho I can give him a full reply on the questio universal. That is a serious questio authorities throughout the country.

Mr. John Fraser: The Minister gave there would be general consultation w well as with individual authorities, and that. However, it is by no means un obligation for the Government to con statute.

Apart from our fundamental object hon. Friends and I believe that the pow over which Parliament should have son therefore it is a matter that, at least, sh by statutory instrument so that when t forward with a set of specifications he w consent of the House of Commons and shall table an amendment that will dea very least, will the Minister accep amendment to place a statutory d Government at least to consult specification? May we have an assur amendment, if tabled, would be accept

Dr. Boyson: As I said to the hon. Ge Secretary of State will consult local as specification is answerable to the cour commitment to the hon. Gentleman t any amendment. We shall look at all th Report, as we are doing now. I can say at this stage.

Mr. Fraser: We were invited to amendment when the Minister spoke e divide on every amendment and I do no the Committee to divide on this. How mean that we are simply allowing this t want to make some progress. I hop permission, Sir Paul, we will have a deb part and we shall express our diss appropriate way when we reach that p

Question put, That the amendment

The Committee divided: Ayes 234, N

Division No. 66]

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Batiste, Sp
Alexander, Richard	Bellingham
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Bendall, Vi
Amess, David	Benyon, W
Ancram, Michael	Best, Keith
Ashby, David	Bevan, Da
Aspinwall, Jack	Blackburn,
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*	Body, Sir R
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*	Bonsor, Sir
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*	Boscawen,
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Bottomley,
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Bottomley,

Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Malone and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh

McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Walter Harrison and
Mr. Tony Banks.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 59, in page 3, line 23, leave out 'or parts of items'.

No. 60, in page 3, line 27, leave out 'or parts of items'.

No. 61, in page 3, line 30, leave out or parts of items'.

No. 62, in page 3, line 33, at end insert 'and'.

No. 63, in page 3, line 36, leave out from 'courses)' to end of line 38.

No. 65, in page 3, line 40, leave out 'or parts of items'.

No. 66, in page 3, line 41, at end insert 'and'.

No. 67, in page 3, line 43, leave out from 'authority' to end of line 46.—*[Dr. Boyson.]*

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I beg to move amendment No. 68, in page 4, line 1, leave out subsection (6).

The amendment seeks to delete subsection (6). It appears to be another example of the Secretary of State building legal safeguards and judge-proofing into the Bill. It is surprising that the Secretary of State has found it necessary to include this catch-all subsection. He has had at least three months in which to draft the legislation.

Clause 3 defines what is meant by local authorities' expenditure for the purpose of part VI of the 1980 Act's support grant. It is acceptable to us, so far as it goes, subject to the safeguards that we are trying to build into clause 3. However, clause 3(6) says:

"Subsection (1) . . . shall have effect subject to any enactment (whenever passed)".

Will the Minister explain what this phrase means and tell the Committee what was the Government's intention in including this phrase? Is it retrospective?

Will the Minister also list the Acts to which the phrase refers? The Committee is being asked to give a blank cheque to the Secretary of State. How are hon. Members to know whether the redefinition of "relevant expenditure" is appropriate in the context of other enactments? Does the Secretary of State know what they are? If so, will he list them, or is this a manifestation of legal paranoia?

9.45 pm

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) for his comments. This is a technical matter and I shall answer as best I can about what this amendment would do and why we are resisting it. The amendment would mean that the definition of relevant expenditure in the Bill would exclude certain items that we do not want excluded. It would delete clause 3(6) which provides that the definition of relevant expenditure is

"subject to any enactment (whenever passed) having the effect that anything is or is not to be treated . . . as relevant expenditure".

An example of such an enactment is the Social Security and Housing Benefit Act 1982, which provides that if an order is made — and one has been made — certain contributions to the housing revenue account are not to be treated as relevant expenditure. It is on this basis that our current practices on rate support grant have been operated. The effect of the amendment would be that in any rate support grant reports and supplementary reports made after the passing of the Bill those contributions would no longer be excluded from relevant expenditure.

It is right that the provisions which provide that certain items are not part of relevant expenditure should continue to have effect. I need hardly remind the Committee again that the purpose of the Bill is to enable us to continue current practice and, as far as possible, clause 3 and the rest of the Bill will ensure a continuance of current practice. I hope that the Opposition will not press the amendment to a vote, because it would undermine part or all of clause 3.

Mr. Hancock: This amendment is a challenge to the Minister because he must tell the Committee what it means. Let me put myself in the position of a local government treasurer reading this legislation and being asked by his members to explain what it means. What does this cover and what does it not cover? It is not good enough for us glibly to push aside an amendment which is not only a probing amendment but one which means something. It means that in future the Government will have to spell out exactly what they mean by it. It is not good enough for us to be told time and time again that these matters will be open to challenge in the courts. That is not a fair basis upon which local government should have to work in the next 12 months after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

We need specific answers to those points. I am sure that with the best will in the world the Minister will say that in time he can give those answers. I look forward to that time and to the correspondence. This debate is sparsely attended, but there is a wider audience outside which has some enthusiasm for local government expenditure. Such enthusiasm is hard to engender in the Committee, but in the months ahead many people will have a difficult time if we do not get some clarification of exactly what is meant by the Minister's statements.

I am sure that *Hansard* will be read by those treasurers and councillors who care about what is happening to local government finance. They will wonder what the Minister meant in his reply to the hon. Member for Houghton and

Washington (Mr. Boyes), who moved the amendment. The Minister must spell out what is covered and what is not. What areas of expenditure does he want to see included but which are not specifically mentioned in the Bill? May we please have answers to those questions?

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply briefly to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock). I shall have to be careful with the words because all these words mean something and have to be interpreted. *[Interruption.]* I try to interpret them for myself at the same time as I interpret them for the Committee and five minutes later I wonder if I have. I should prefer to write to the hon. Member about this, because I do not want to be tied to what I say is the interpretation. For example, I have written down for my own reference the definitions for net expenditure and total expenditure. I have written that net expenditure is, first, from the rate support grant, secondly, from the rate and precept income, thirdly, from balances and, fourthly, from specific and supplementary grants. Total expenditure, which one would expect to be more, is all these without specific and supplementary grants. Having understood that, I think that I had better be careful on the other definitions.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Boyes: I beg to move amendment No. 69, in page 4, line 12, leave out paragraph *(b)*.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this amendment it will be convenient also to take amendment No. 70, in page 4, line 12, leave out from 'by' to end of line and insert "the addition or subtraction of such descriptions of expenditure or receipts."

Mr. Boyes: Clause 3(7) allows the Secretary of State to adjust the definition of total expenditure given in the Bill by adding or subtracting items in any future year. The definitions of relevant and total expenditure form the basis of the legal difficulty currently facing the Government in their rate support grant and Rates Act policy. That power will give the Secretary of State a substantial measure of control in the future to affect the basis of local authority spending policies.

In his statement to the House on 16 December 1986, the Secretary of State said:

"The Bill is designed to make no changes in policy, but as far as possible to apply existing policy within a tight timetable."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, col. 1051.]

In fact, the Minister is taking several opportunities in the Bill to augment his powers, as in this case. Clause 3(7)*(b)* contains unspecific and sweeping powers for the Secretary of State to reduce or increase an authority's total expenditure, which is used to calculate its entitlement to grant. There is no sign of how the power will be used or by what criteria that use will be governed. Given that it may be used arbitrarily to deprive local authorities of millions of pounds, it is essential that Parliament retains an ability to scrutinise the use of the power rather than leaving such general powers in the hands of the Executive. Our amendment will delete paragraph *(b)*, which includes these extra powers.

Dr. Boyson: Section 56 (8) of the 1980 Act provides that total expenditure is relevant expenditure reduced by the amount of specific and supplementary grants, and adjusted by the addition or subtraction of such descriptions of expenditure or receipt that the Secretary of State may direct. Directions were made under this power for each of the years 1983-84 to 1986-87. It is intended to make specifications under clause 3(7)*(b)* which broadly will reflect the directions made in the past.

The effect of amendment No. 69 is that total expenditure will be relevant expenditure reduced by the amount of specific and supplementary grants. Total expenditure will not therefore be the same as in the past. The basis of the Bill is to put in definitions that will stand up that we presumed from 1980 to 1986 were the definitions on which so much local government financing went ahead.

Amendment No. 70 will replace the power to make specifications in clause 3(7)*(b)* with a power in the same terms as the present power in section 56 (8) of the 1980 Act. The purpose of the amendment is to find out why the terms of the power have been changed. The reasons are that the existing power allows adjustment to be made only in respect of expenditure—that is, expenditure incurred in respect of third parties — and receipts which are, income from third parties.

Some of the adjustments made in the past were not, or might not, be expenditure or receipts. I am sure that the Committee is following this very carefully. Clearly, the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) is. For example, directions were made so that discounts for prompt payments of rates should be added—something that has been discontinued in most parts of Britain, but we used to have discounts for rates if they were paid by a certain time.

It is only arguable that that is expenditure. Directions were also made that certain reductions in block grant as a result of regulations under schedule 10 of the 1980 Act —that is, the Act on educational pooling—should be added. But those reductions in block grant were neither expenditure nor receipts. Unless the power is in the terms of that in clause 3(7)*(b)*, it will not be possible to reproduce what has been the practice for 1983-84 to 1986-87 in the future. One will realise what a disaster that would be for the country.

Mr. Pike: By his comments the Minister showed that there might be a case for not pressing the amendment. However, rather than giving one example, he needed to give more details about why it was essential that the clause should not be amended.

On amendments Nos. 69 and 70 the Minister said that the Government's intention is, as far as possible, to try to maintain the status quo in all respects. However, we would argue that that is not the case. Burnley borough council, on which I used to serve, still gives 2·5 per cent. discount for the prompt payment of rates. That is highly successful, although whether it is worthwhile is considered every year by the council when it fixes the annual rate. The council must calculate how much discount it will give and provide extra income to cover that. The prompt payment of rates means that it can save on interest payments and gain income from investing money for a short period.

However, I doubt whether clause 3(7)*(b)* means exactly what the Minister says it does. If it really does mean what the Minister is saying, I could accept the logic of leaving it as it is, although, obviously, we do not like many of the provisions in the Bill.

I would argue that the clause gives the Secretary of State scope beyond what the Minister was saying and that

[Mr. Pike]

is the danger. If the Minister is sincere in what he has just said, and if the Secretary of State is also sincere—he is in the Chamber—they should tell the House tonight that they are prepared to amend the clause on Report in order to clarify it because it can be interpreted in a different way.

I strongly believe that it is not what a Minister says, whether in Committee upstairs or on the Floor of the House, that makes the law; it is the Bill as it is written which will have to be interpreted in the courts. Even if we are prepared to be generous to the present Secretary of State, another Secretary of State could use this in a different way at a later stage.

In all seriousness, if the Minister really believes what he said to us, let him prove his good faith by saying that the Government are prepared to look at this again and return on Report with something which will make it clear that what he said is what the clause actually means. At the moment, I believe that it can be interpreted in a different way and others will also believe that. If that is the case, it is not acceptable. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to look at the clause in that spirit and say that the Government are prepared to think again.

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful for the speech of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I am glad to know that the 2·5 per cent. discount is still paid in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I come from the next valley, the Rossendale valley, and a 2·5 per cent. discount was always paid there. I never understand why authorities in London do not have discounts to get their money in more quickly. If there is a north-south divide, it seems to be that discounts are paid in the north but not in the south.

This week we in the Government have been blamed for the number of amendments that we have put down because of the speed with which we have had to bring this Bill before the House. If we started putting down more amendments on the suggestion of the hon. Member for Burnely, honest as I am sure he is in the desire for further clarification, we would have to be careful what we did.

We shall consider what the hon. Gentleman said and what is contained in the clause. If it is then our conviction that the amendments can be expressed more clearly and will stand up in the courts——

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress. and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put,

That at this day's sitting the Local Government Finance Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. *—[Mr. Ryder.]*

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 10.

Division No. 67] **[10.01 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hancock, Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael

Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Clay, Robert
Lamond, James
Maynard, Miss Joan
Pike, Peter
Redmond, Martin
Skinner, Dennis
Wilson, Gordon

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Walter Harrison and
Mr. Donald Coleman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Local Government Finance Bill

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Dr. Boyson: In conclusion, I recommend to my hon. Friends that we vote against this amendment and keep the clause as it is.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment made: No. 74, in page 4, line 17, leave out from 'subsection' to end of line 18 and insert—

'(1) or (7) above shall be calculated; and an addition or substraction specified under subsection (1) or (7) above may or may not represent an item of account debited or credited to the authority's rate fund revenue account for the year.'.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Mr. Meadowcroft: I beg to move amendment No. 77, in page 4, line 23, leave out '*(b)* or *(c)*'.

I hope that the amendment's import becomes clear. If the wording is not exactly correct it must be remembered that we do not have the great parliamentary draftsmen at our disposal. I am sure that wording could be corrected in another place if we convince the Committee, by our eloquence, to accept the principle.

The crucial point concerns the amounts which are available under central funding through grants to local government and which are constrained by the provisions in the clause that we seek to amend. The amendment seeks to take out the provision for the transport supplementary grant — to take out subsection *(b)* or *(c)* in section 54(2) of the 1980 Local Government, Planning and Land Act. That would give local government some £7 million of transport supplementary grant and national parks supplementary grant.

Since the advent of deregulation, the transport problems, especially in urban areas, have been more acute. This is of no surprise to many hon. Members. Local government has to subsidise transport to ensure a proper transport system is available but providing that service has become a serious problem because of lack of resources. I hope, therefore, that the Government will recognise the problem and recognise that this sum of money should go back into the amount for local government. We will then have some extra help, small though it may be, to deal with local government problems.

10.15 pm

Dr. Boyson: The amendment would mean that relevant expenditure would be a figure net of transport supplementary grant and national parks supplementary grant unless my right hon. Friend makes specifications to avoid that. According to current practice, relevant expenditure is not a figure net of these supplementary grants. We wish that to continue. Therefore, the amendment serves no purpose and I recommend hon. Members to resist it in spite of the oratory of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) which I found slightly persuasive if I could have been persuaded.

Amendment negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Boyes: Clause 3 is intended to give the Minister effective power to rewrite the definitions when it suits him. New powers may be given to the Minister in subsections (4)*(c)*, (5)*(c)*, (7)*(b)* and (8). He may adjust the basis of calculation of debit and credit items of account; he may adjust up or down the basis of calculation of total expenditure for any local authority; he may specify the manner of calculation of total expenditure and the factors to be taken into account. For practical purposes, the Secretary of State will gain control of local authority expenditure calculations and definitions with the clear intention of using the power to restrict spending. There is no limitation in the Bill on the manner of calculation or factors which may be relevant. The power is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny and there is no requirement to consult affected parties, despite the fact that large amounts could be involved. It is normal practice in relation to grant matters to consult at least the local authority associations. Finally, I agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and with the remarks that I made myself on other amendments which demonstrate that certain clauses are completely incomprehensible to the people who have to administer local government finance.

Dr. Boyson: I must not be tempted by the last point made by the hon. Gentleman. I was glad to hear that he

[Dr. Boyson]

still agrees with himself and with what he said on earlier amendments, which shows consistency that all of us should follow. Certainly I try to be consistent.

The clause defines for the year 1987-88 and subsequent years the relevant expenditure and total expenditure of local authorities for the purposes of part VI of the 1980 Act. The clause is a key provision in providing a new statutory definition of relevant and total expenditure and follows the practice adopted since 1981. So once again we are trying to continue a practice that we believe should remain.

The clause provides a definition which refers to it of account debited or credited to the rate fund reve account set up by clauses 1 and 2. Those items of acco include as debit items transfers from the rate fund reve account to special funds such as reserve funds, and credit items transfers to the rate fund revenue acco from special funds. In short, the clause is the key to set up in statute the practical method of calculating relev and total expenditure which we have been operating si 1981. The definitions in the Bill will validate them for past, and also, we trust, for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the

Clause 4

VALIDATION FOR PAST AND GENERAL PROVISION FOR FUTURE

Dr. Boyson: I beg to move amendment No. 79, in page 4, line 43, leave out from first 'of' to end of line and insert 'an amount of block grant payable'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 90 and 187.

Dr. Boyson: These are technical amendments to the provisions dealing with the calculation of relevant and total expenditure for certain previous years. They are necessary if we are to be able to make the conclusive calculations of block grant payable and further supplementary reports for years as intended.

For England, supplementary reports intended to be the final ones have been made for 1981-82 and for 1982-83. All that is intended for the future for those years it to make a conclusive calculation of block grant payable to each authority. Clause 4 provides for that to be done. For other previous years for England, further supplementary reports are intended—clauses 4 and 5 provide for that.

When conclusive calculations for supplementary reports are made for years before 1986-87, the authorities to be covered by the calculations and reports include the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

The conclusive calculations for 1981-82 and for 1982-83 will simply confirm entitlements that have already been notified to authorities, but if, as a result of further reports, the grant entitlement of those authorities is different from the grant that has already been paid, any adjustment will be made with the appropriate residuary body in accordance with the Local Government Act 1985. The effect of any adjustment will thus be shared among the district councils in a metropolitan county area or among the boroughs in London.

The amendments will enable clauses 4 and 5 to cater for the GLC for years before 1986-87. I know that there are hon. Members who served on that council. Without the amendments, we could not proceed as we intend, and the status quo would not be maintained. I commend the amendments to the Committee.

Mr. John Fraser: If I have understood the Minister correctly, there could be a retrospective change in the accounts of the GLC which would affect local authorities that have no control whatever over the decisions that have been made. One cannot possibly attribute to Southwark, Lambeth, Merton or Sutton the consequences of decisions made by the GLC.

The very least that one ought to ask is that the Minister should give assurances that, if he is thinking of making any substantial changes retrospectively in the construction of the GLC's accounts, he will consult the London authorities about the consequences of those decisions, as they could be adversely affected by decisions in which they play no part.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister explain how he would intend to do what he has just outlined with regard to any interpretation of the GLC's accounts? I do not know how it will be done. I do not know where all the information about the GLC's accounts is held. I assume that the Department of the Environment has a fairly shrewd idea what went on in the days of the GLC. I hasten to add that there was nothing improper.

The London residuary body is still in the process of winding up the affairs of the GLC's various committees but, I understand, is making fairly slow progress. I listened to what the Minister said, but I am not sure how he would obtain the information with which to do what he says he would do. I should be most grateful if the Minister could assist me in that respect.

Dr. Boyson: The Government amendments make any required action possible. I cannot this evening refer to the details of that action. I should not like to delay the Committee with the details at this late hour. They may be more difficult to understand than some of the amendments. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) raised an interesting point. The hon. Gentleman often raises interesting points. I am quite prepared to see the hon. Gentleman or to write to him about the details. There is no question of changing our re-interpretation of the GLC accounts. The information about the GLC expenditure is submitted by the London residuary body. I know that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the matter. I certainly did not wish to disturb his sleep this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Straw: The Committee has caught me on the hop. I shall endeavour to follow in the rhetorical footsteps of the Minister. I beg to move amendment No. 80, in page 4, line 44, leave out subsection (5).

Subsection 5 states:

"In relation to any intermediate year—

(a) after the passing of this Act relevant and total expenditure of a local authority shall be calculated for the purposes of Part VI of the 1980 Act in accordance with section 5 below, and

(b) anything done (including an adjustment made) after the passing of this Act for those purposes shall, to the extent that it involves relevant or total expenditure of a local authority, be done by reference to expenditure so calculated."

In a moment we shall have an opportunity to debate the wider issues raised by the clause. The Opposition moved this amendment to get an explanation from the Minister about the operation of the subsection.

Dr. Boyson: I shall attempt to give an explanation to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about why we reject this clause. It will damage the Bill. I am sorry, we must not reject the clause.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Why not?

Dr. Boyson: I was looking forward to the debate. The hon. Lady may participate in it. We have not heard the hon. Lady's voice today in the stand part debate. With some of these figures, she may be thinking of standing fast.

The amendment will have the effect that relevant and total expenditure for the so-called intermediate years—that is the years 1983-84 to 1986-87 in England and 1984-85 to 1986-87 in Wales—could not be calculated for any of the purposes for which such figures of expenditure will be needed after the passage of the Bill. Thus, the amendment will prevent my right hon. Friend from making any further supplementary reports for these years. They could not continue to act in the way intended and as local government expects.

[Dr. Boyson]

In short, the amendment would prevent us from achieving our aim of maintaining the status quo. Even Labour Members, I hope, would not wish us to depart from that. I recommend that the Committee reject the amendment. Basically, in this clause we are following, as far as one can, preceding practice.

Ms. Clare Short: We are constantly told that the Bill is about validating the past. The Minister tells us that, if the amendment were passed, the Government could not interfere with settlements for 1984-85. That is a long time ago. I am surprised that the Government need take powers back that far. Will the Minister explain more thoroughly, rather than just reading from the brief, exactly what the effect would be if the amendment were passed?

10.30 pm

Dr. Boyson: I shall answer the hon. Lady without reading the brief. Let me put it on the record so that lawyers do not need to fight about the next definition.

Supplementary reports are made. Each year the Government give a rate support grant settlement to each authority and it then knows what it will receive. But, as the year passes, the data change — population, rateable values, the number of children under five, the number of old people, and so on — and there is continuing updating, so that, by the end of the year, the position of the 485 local authorities has changed. A reassessment occurs from time to time, including one of expenditure.

I have referred to the intermediate years of 1984-85 to 1986-87, the present year. Supplementary reports are required to let the local authorities know the exact position. We cannot obtain those supplementary reports until we get the legislation and our definitions right. Every Government have used supplementary reports from previous years so that they continually bring up to date the amount of money that goes to each local authority.

Amendment negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended stand part of the Bill.

Dr. Boyson: Clause 4 validates all those things done by the Secretary of State for rate support grant purposes under the provisions described in clause 4(2). It also provides that for those years for which rate support grant supplementary reports have been made which are intended to be final, the conclusive calculations of block grant are to be made on the basis of the supplementary reports and the information that the Secretary of State took into account in making them. The clause provides that the future decisions on supplementary reports for 1983-84, for 1984-85, and for 1985-86, which do not yet exist, and for 1986-87 shall be taken in line with the provisions of clause 5.

Clause 5, when we come to it, provides that expenditure shall be defined for those years in the same way as for 1987-88. The supplementary reports will contain a definition of total and relevant expenditure and all the other information, just as is being done for the 1987-88 report.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister will be aware that the London borough of Newham has seen his Department a number of times to try to do something about the problems that were first encountered through the creation of special funds in the 1982-83 accounts which, were disallowed by the Department of the Envi Those contributions were neglected in the accounts and, due to additional grant penal resulted in a deficit of about £4 million. I coul some detail about Newham's current position foll position in 1982-83 and the creation of speci However, it has been reflected since then i settlements we have had. I should like to know there is still a chance for Newham's case to be before the Bill becomes an Act. Is there any point to see the Minister yet again in order to explain N case and to see whether we can get some redress now saying that with the passage of the cla eventually the Act, we might as well forget a problems that arose in 1982-83 and that we have r either in law or by appeal to the Minister?

Dr. Boyson: I understand why the hon. G raised that issue, which is a source of concern for However, that is involved in schedule 2 and I wou to deal with it then. I am aware of the hon. Ge point.

Mr. Spearing: I appreciate what the Minister are to deal with amendment No. 132, on schedu understand it, the Minister is saying that any ad will have to be taken account of within the fo schedule 2 and cannot be in any way adjusted u terms of clause 4 because it is a rigid clause. Minister confirm that? That is, in effect, what he I would like him to be explicit.

Dr. Boyson: The hon. Gentleman is correct: it under schedule 2. If there is any disagreement nothing to stop the hon. Gentleman from ta amendment on this matter. However, as it stands under schedule 2.

Mr. Straw: As the Minister has explained, validates past Acts and makes general provisior future. It seeks to clear up the mess of the past se of rate support grant and local government regimes which the Government have created. D course of the debates we have had statements Minister and the Secretary of State trying to dis responsibility for the 1980 Act, and every amen since then. We have had one every year. It is typi Government that whenever anything goes wr pretend that somehow they had nothing to do w

The financial regime of local authorities is ba the 1980 Act. I am glad to see the hon. Me Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) agreeing with that. Tha the creation of the right hon. Member for Her Henseltine) and it was supported enthusiastically Conservative Member of the time. It was the Opposition who opposed that Act on the groun was impractical, and incomprehensible and woul serious problems for local authorities. By this Bil been proved right and the Government have bee wrong.

I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of St some humility. They keep coming to the Disp saying that they dislike the present local financial regime. That may be the case but why vote for it and why do they, no doubt, support

Government? We are seeing a latter-day conversion. What guarantee do we have that the new system will be any better than the present system?

Our real concern about clause 4 is not that it seeks to validate past Acts, which people had thought were valid anyway, but about the way in which it seeks to do that, especially, as we discussed under the group of amendments including No. 2A, the fact that, in order to validate the provisions, the Secretary of State seeks to make himself immune from court action. We had a detailed debate on that on Monday and I do not intend to repeat it.

However, I wish to ask the Secretary of State two sets of questions. Is he willing to consider—I have not given him notice of this—having the clause amended to bring it into line with what he said it meant when we discussed it on Monday? I refer in particular to clause 4(6). The matter was first raised on Monday by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). The Secretary of State quoted subsection (1) which refers to

"Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act".

The right hon. Gentleman said:

"It is only in relation to actions taken before this Act was published that anything I do escapes challenge."

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said:

"Passed not published."

The Secretary of State replied:

"The hon. Gentleman is wrong, because since the Act was published I have done nothing nor will I do anything in the sense of this clause. I have taken no actions whatever in relation to the rate support grant settlement since the time that I realised it would be illegal for me to do so."

Therefore, my first question to the Secretary of State is: is he willing to consider writing into the opening part of the clause a replacement for the phrase

"before the passing of this Act"

using the words, "before 18 December 1986", which is the day that the Bill was published?

My second question is more substantial, although the first was not insubstantial. During his first speech on Monday, the Secretary of State sought to explain that, in his view, the Opposition were wrong to believe that subsection (6), which makes the clause judge-proof, was wide in its effect. I asked what effect subsection (6) would have. The right hon. Gentleman replied:

"It depends on the subject of the litigation. If it has to do with total expenditure or involves the definition of total expenditure, the Act will prevail over any decision of the court . . . Where a matter has nothing to do with the definition of total expenditure or with the rate support grant calculation based on it, it is judiciable but it might be better for the court to await the passage of the Bill so that it knows the definition of total expenditure."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 643-70.]

I accept that if the Bill as drafted was so narrowly defined as the Secretary of State said in that statement, at least there would be less to argue about than we think there is now. Our problem is that clause 4, as drafted, appears to be wide. I do not want to repeat what I said on Monday, but anyone who looks at part VI of the 1980 Act realises that it covers not just definitions of total expenditure or the rate support calculation based upon it, but a wide area —the whole scheme of block grant as set down in that Act. That is reinforced and buttressed by provisions such as section 8 and schedule 2 to the Local Government Finance Act 1982, sections 2 and 3 of the Education Act 1986 and section 2 of the Rate Support Grants Act 1986.

If the Secretary of State only wishes the clause to be as narrow as his statement to the House, is he willing to see it amended so that, under clause 4(1), it would read:

"anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act for the purposes of the relevant provisions in relation to any of the initial years or intermediate years and only in relation to the definition of total expenditure or the rate support grant calculation based upon it".

I am quoting from the words that the right hon. Gentleman used. If he means what he says, I can see no reason why that clause should not be limited as he said.

The Secretary of State says that our concern about the judge-proofing of this clause and clause 6 is unjustified. Earlier today my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) quoted respectable legal advice to the effect that our fears are justified. It would be a measure of the Secretary of State's true intentions if he agreed to consider the two points that I have raised and to make a substantive reply on Report.

10.45 pm

Ms. Clare Short: There is another very important point. The Secretary of State claims that the Bill is necessary to validate action that he took when he thought he was acting according to the law. We have said all along that if that were all, it would not be controversial. However, we know that in the past local authorities have taken action that, on good legal advice, they thought was lawful, but which is being made unlawful by the Bill. We must ask that the protection that is to be accorded to the Secretary of State should be accorded to local authorities. Their actions should also be validated and made judge-proof. If he were an honourable Secretary of State and if he were honourably trying to extricate himself from a legal difficulty, he would extend this protection to local authorities. He should explain why he is unwilling to do so.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When we debate amendment No. 87 there will be an opportunity to raise the Birmingham point at much greater length. However, I accept the point that, if the Secretary of State is seeking indemnity for past unlawful actions, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and the indemnity should apply equally to authorities like Birmingham.

Mr. Ridley: Since the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has asked me to respond to two specific questions, I shall have great pleasure in doing so. It gives me an opportunity to clear up the slight misunderstanding which the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was in such a ferment about and which he raised on a point of order. As one who purports to put legal challenges before the Committee, he might at least realise the difference between a point of order and a point of substance. But we live in hope.

The hon. Member for Blackburn first asked the Government to substitute an earlier date—18 December —for the validation. One minute's thought will make him realise that the period between 18 December and the passing of this Bill would be a period when there was no proper definition of rate support grant. The old definition would remain in force. It would be possible for authorities to bring a mass of legal cases, on the basis that at present the law is as it is under the 1980 Act and that the definition was not valid for the period covering the passage of the

[Mr. Ridley]

Bill. He must realise that that would not be a sensible solution. Law suits can arise not only from actions taken by the Secretary of State; they can arise on any matter that an authority chooses to pick upon at any time.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked about the letter that his hon. Friend the Member for Copeland read out from the Association of Municipal Authorities. I am grateful to the association for sending me a copy of that letter. As I said on Monday, the provisions of clause 4(6) and clause 6(4) validate decisions and actions under those parts of existing legislation that involve total or relevant expenditure. I said that anything that is wholly extraneous to total or relevant expenditure and hence is not within those parts of the existing legislation that are specified in the Bill is not covered by the validation.

If we did not make the position on those past decisions absolutely clear, it would be a recipe for costly and unnecessary litigation. I hope that the Opposition do not believe that such litigation flowing from the technical flaw which we are here putting right would be in anybody's interest.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is repeating what he said on Monday. Does he not accept that part VI of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 goes far wider than simply to define total expenditure?

Mr. Ridley: That is exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman has not grasped, that total expenditure or relevant expenditure is endemic in all of the sections of those Acts that are quoted in the Bill. It is impossible to disentangle some parts of any conceivable court case from those parts that relate to total expenditure. That is exactly what I said on Monday and that is the hon. Gentleman's answer.

Mr. Straw: It is true that total expenditure pops up in a number of sections in part VI of the 1980 Act, but that is not the exclusive concern of part VI. In order to bring the law more into line with the Minister's statements we have not suggested that there should no longer be any reference to part VI of the 1980 Act, but that that reference should be limited to references to total expenditure. What is wrong with that, since that is exactly what he told the House on Monday?

Mr. Ridley: I was right on Monday and I am right again today. It is impossible to distinguish some parts of part VI of the 1980 Act about total or relevant expenditure from other matters in that Act. It is the foundation upon which the whole of rate support grant and rate limitation have been calculated and one cannot, as it were, divide the foundations into some parts which are faulty and have to be validated and other parts which are not. If the hon. Gentleman will think about it, he will discover that such a distincition is virtually impossible.

Mr. Dobson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: This validation concerns only past decisions. When I come to make further decisions for all the years from 1983-84 to 1986-87 on which there are outstanding supplementary reports to be made, my decision——

Mr. Dobson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: —will be subject to the normal the courts. My decisions on the rate support 1987-88 and on reports and supplementar thereafter will be subject to review by the cour

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Ms. Clare Short: The right hon. Gentleman s way.

Mr. Ridley: Under the formula in sched determination of rate limits for 1987-88 will be review by the courts. Decisions on future y limitation will, of course, also be subject to revi courts. I hope that puts to rest the misunderstand Opposition Front Bench speakers have broug debate.

Mr. Spearing: I would not have risen had the of State had the courtesy to give way when I o Friend——

Mr. Ridley: That is what I have done: I have to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Spearing: I hope that I can be as polit improve on the politeness of the right hon. Ge

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend could scarcely that.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister spoke about c applying to definitions of expenditure. He im that court capping, as I have nicknamed it, ap to definitions of expenditure. However, later h paraphrase—that everything is so intermingled impossible to separate one element from anothe appeared to validate the point made by my hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that claus wider ambit that the Secretary of State planned

Earlier in the debate, the Minister f Government assured me that the Secretary of earlier today received a letter from me about t matters and that I would receive a reply. I ros point. I invite the Secretary of State to interve speech, because I will gladly give way to him. I r if the reply to that letter would come from him a cover these points at issue. If we went into the detail tonight we would not be popular with o Members. I want an understanding from the Se State that not only will I get a reply—I have that assurance already from the Minister of S that that reply will be signed by him and will ac matters that we have been discussing.

Mr. Ridley: I shall send the hon. Gentleman copy of *Hansard* with the speech that I have j which is a full answer to the letter from the AMA. me as saying:

"If it has to do with total expenditure or in definition of total expenditure, the Act will prevail decision of the court."

The Acts specified in the Bill all involve the def total expenditure, and that is inseparable fro matters concerned in those Acts. What I said was valid. I invite the hon. Gentleman to repeat wha well.

Mr. Spearing: I think that the Secretary of misunderstood me. The letter that I referred to w letter that I read out earlier today by my hon. F Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham); it w

that I wrote yesterday which the Secretary of State received this morning. The right hon. Gentleman may not have seen it yet, but his hon. Friend the Minister has assured me that I will receive a reply, and I am grateful for the assurance that it will be signed by him.

Mr. Ridley: I shall be happy to sign the letter myself, having checked it carefully, it if will help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State tell the Committee whether the legal interpretation that he is now giving, partly in response to the representations from the AMA, is the interpretation that he has arrived at himself, or whether he has received legal advice from the officials of his Department to that effect? If it is the latter, are they the people who drafted the offending legislation in the first place?

Mr. Ridley: I must be responsible for my words at the Dispatch Box. I would not seek to hide behind the advice or assistance that I receive from others.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Secretary of State carry on from his quotation from *Hansard* of 19 January? It says:

"It depends on the subject of litigation. If it has to do with total expenditure or involves the definition of total expenditure, the Act will prevail over any decision of the court . . . Where a matter has nothing to do with the definition of total expenditure or with the rate support grant calculation based on it, it is judiciable but it might be better for the court to await the passage of the Bill so that it knows the definition of total expenditure."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 643.]

Since the Secretary of State has told us that they are so closely interwoven, can he—so that we can move on—give us a good example of some other form of definition that could be challenged in the courts along the lines that he gave in his speech on 19 January?

Mr. Ridley: It is like Question Time, Mr. Walker, but I am happy to continue as long as the Committee wishes.

A possible parallel would be the rateable value of an authority, which is nothing to do with the definition of total expenditure, but is a matter concerned in those Acts.

Another case that I cited on Monday was the Greenwich case, which concerns the multiplier. I do not want to prejudice that case, but the mulitplier has not yet been the subject of a decision because it might be embodied in the first supplementary report for 1986-87, and therefore will be subject to a final decision by me at a stage later than the passage of this Act. I do not want to prejudge the decision of the court, but that matter may be open to judicial review, as I said on Monday in response to the hon. Gentleman.

I have given him two examples of matters that are not within the scope of the Bill or proof against action by the courts. I am sure that with his great legal knowledge and ingenuity he can think of many more examples of the same sort.

11 pm

Mr. Straw: We have all listened with care to the Secretary of State, but the truth is that the assurances that he sought to give on Monday do not square with the wide terms of the Bill as it is drafted. As the letter from the legal adviser to the Inner London education authority points out:

"There is nothing limiting the deeming provision to errors arising out of the erroneous definition, and therefore calculation, of relevant and total expenditure."

Our point is that the present wording clearly appears to cover any procedural impropriety, failure to consider a matter rationally or other unlawfulness in respect of anything done by the Secretary of State for those statutory puposes.

It is no good the Secretary of State seeking to be patronising with the Committee. I am afraid to say that we have been here before. Ministers have too often given bland assurances about the nature of legislation which have turned out not to be the case. Indeed, if the assurances that were given by his ally the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) had been correct, the Government would not be in their present mess. It is precisely because Acts have turned out to be something quite different from that which Ministers promised the House that we are in this mess.

What is more, Labour Members are aware of the fact that Conservative Members of Parliament pay scant regard to the rule of law. For them, it is simply an instrument to use or to discard as it suits them. It is all right for them to lecture us on the rule of law when it suits them, but when they make unlawful Acts, they come to the House to seek wide immunity from the law, and immunity not only in respect of Acts which everybody thought were valid in the past, but from errors, mistakes or acts of unfairness. It is that which we wish to pursue. It is on that that the Secretary of State has given no proper explanation and it is for that reason that we shall seek to vote against clause 4.

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 217, Noes 169.

Division No. 68] **[11.02 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Budgen, Nick
Alexander, Richard	Burt, Alistair
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Butcher, John
Amess, David	Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Ancram, Michael	Butterfill, John
Ashby, David	Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Aspinwall, Jack	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*	Carttiss, Michael
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*	Cash, William
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*	Chope, Christopher
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Churchill, W. S.
Baldry, Tony	Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Batiste, Spencer	Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Bellingham, Henry	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Bendall, Vivian	Cockeram, Eric
Benyon, William	Colvin, Michael
Bevan, David Gilroy	Conway, Derek
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Cope, John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John	Corrie, John
Blackburn, John	Couchman, James
Body, Sir Richard	Crouch, David
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Dickens, Geoffrey
Bottomley, Peter	Dorrell, Stephen
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Dover, Den
Boyson, Dr Rhodes	Dunn, Robert
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Durant, Tony
Bright, Graham	Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Brinton, Tim	Eggar, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon	Emery, Sir Peter
Brooke, Hon Peter	Evennett, David
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*	Fairbairn, Nicholas
Browne, John	Fallon, Michael
Bruinvels, Peter	Farr, Sir John
Bryan, Sir Paul	Favell, Anthony
Buck, Sir Antony	Fenner, Dame Peggy

Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Straff'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Malone, Gerald
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mocre, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn &*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Ge
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Wor*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretfor*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonag
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penis*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(She*
Martin, Michael
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michae
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Ab*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanle
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Op*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Lee*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Booth*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hac*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle o*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabet
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Lad*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S &*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansb*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gow*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David

Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Chairman do report Progress and ask leave to sit again. —*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Walker. I wish to make it clear that we do not intend to oppose the motion to report Progress, but out of that motion arises a legitimate question that I hope it is appropriate to raise on a point of order. I shall raise it in whatever way is appropriate——

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The question is debatable. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to speak to the question before the House that is perfectly in order.

11.15 pm

Dr. Cunningham: I think that I shall continue with my point of order, Mr. Walker.

We are entitled to have a statement from the Government about their intentions on this business. We have just concluded discussion on clause 4. The Bill, as it now stands, has 17 clauses and five schedules. That was at the last count, but we have difficulty keeping up with the Government changes. Do the Government intend to table any further amendments or new clauses? When do they intend to bring the business back to the Floor of the House? Do they intend to introduce a timetable motion for further discussion of the Bill?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has not correctly counted the number of clauses and schedules — *[Interruption.]* It sometimes helps to see what we have done rather than work on last year's "Bradshaw".

There is a possibility of one further Government amendment at some stage in the Bill's progress. It is not yet ready to be tabled. I have not counted the amendment's words any more than the hon. Gentleman has counted the clauses in the Bill.

We have made a little progress today, although not as much as we had hoped. I shall consult my right hon. Friends about the Government's intentions, and no doubt in due course the hon. Gentleman will come to know them through the usual channels.

Mr. Tony Banks: I wish to push the Secretary of State a little further. When can we expect an announcement? I have twice brought my sponge bag, and twice I have returned home early. My wife clearly thinks that I am having an unsuccessful affair.

Mr. Ridley: I really do not think that I can be held responsible for the disappointment of Mrs. Banks.

Question put and agreed to.

Committee report Progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Mr. J. J. Murray and Mr. J. J. Calvey

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

11.18 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): I am glad of the opportunity to raise this matter, and a little surprised that I do so somewhat earlier than I had expected.

James John Murray and John Joseph Calvey were arrested on 24 June 1985 and, despite five bail applications, remained in custody until acquitted after a trial lasting seven working days. They spent 16 months in prison.

On 7 October 1986, both men faced an indictment returned to the Old Bailey in London. There were two counts on the indictment against each man. One count alleged offences of wrongly withholding information under section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, and the second alleged a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The evidence against the men was that they had assisted two known terrorists to evade arrest by driving them out of the area of Leyland to south Wales at a time when they knew that the police were anxious to arrest them because they had been involved in a proposed act of terrorism.

The proposed act of terrorism was to cause an explosion at the Eagle and Child public house at Weeton. Throughout intense questioning Joseph Calvey denied any knowledge of the act of terrorism and only after James Murray had been questioned at great length over a period of several days did he make an admission, under duress, which he immediately retracted when solicitors were able to take his instructions. By virtue of their acquittal it is argued that a jury recognised that these men were innocent throughout and that their involvement in providing transport for terrorism was done innocently or, at the very worst, under duress.

Both men were refused costs at the end of the trial. That was especially harsh in the case of Calvey, because he contributed several thousand pounds towards his own costs, the burden of which would otherwise have fallen on the state. Both men had a record in the Preston and Leyland area as diligent and hard working. They often worked seven days a week. They were family men highly respected within the communities in which they lived. James Murray was known by his neighbours as a quiet, gentle man. Unfortunately, it may be said that he had a "wrong" relative whom, of course, he had not chosen.

Originally the men were detained at Risley remand centre where their families and friends had access to them and could give them moral support. In the case of Mr. Murray, this also enabled him to see his children. The committal proceedings into which the men were joined took place at Lambeth magistrates' court. Following the committal, they were remanded to Wormwood Scrubs. Despite entreaties, both on an emotional and financial basis, efforts to have the men returned to Risley failed. Their solicitors made repeated written requests and I made representations on humanitarian grounds to the Home Secretary for Murray in particular to be returned north to enable his wife and children to see him. This was refused.

It is my considered opinion that any claim for an ex gratia payment for compensation must be based on assurances the men received prior to them being charged with the offences. Whilst in custody James Murray was

[Mr. Stan Thorne]

given promises. The first assurance Mr. Murray received was on page 85 of the handwritten depositions. It is as follows:

"Answer: Look I have got to go back there.
Question: What do you mean?
Answer: If they found out that I had been talking then that's it. I don't want knee-capping. That's if I'm lucky.
Question: So you do know something?
Answer: Remained silent.
Question: Its up to you Jim, only you know the truth about these matters. What you tell us does not get repeated anywhere else."

The second assurance Mr. Murray received is on page 107 and is in the following terms:

"Question: Right Jim let's carry on.
Answer: You don't know what they're like. I'm going to get a bullet in the back if I'm not careful.
Question: Try not to worry Jim. I have told you before what you tell us does not go anywhere. It is between the three of us."

Whilst not specifically recited in written evidence, Calvey was also given similar assurances. The effect of those assurances was that the information being provided by the men would go no further than the police officers to whom they were talking.

Contrary to this, not only was the information they were providing used to found an indictment on which they were acquitted, but it was published in the most detailed and graphic terms to those whom the men feared most and with whom, until a late stage in the proceedings, they shared the dock. To give the information provided to known and dangerous members of the IRA, despite their custody, is a breach of confidence of the gravest possible terms.

The purpose underlining the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that there should be co-operation between Irish nationals and British nationals to curtail the activities of terrorists. It is a tragedy that, when requested to provide information, and so doing on the basis that it is to be held in confidence, not only is that information used to prosecute but it is also published to those whom these men and their families most fear. This is surely entirely contrary to the spirit of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and, accordingly, it can be argued that these men are entitled to some ex gratia payment for the abuse of their trust evidenced above.

They have lost their livelihood and suffered considerable personal anguish and pain although they are innocent of any offence. The men were requested to provide information. On expressing fears for their safety before doing so, they were assured that the information they gave would be treated confidentially. Not only was it not treated confidentially, it was used to base a prosecution against them, the result of which was that they spent the equivalent of what was almost a two-year prison sentence in custody prior to being acquitted by a jury. If people are to be encouraged to provide evidence concerning acts of terrorism, this can hardly be described as an encouraging way of dealing with them.

I hope that the Home Secretary will consider these representations in depth and find it possible to make an ex gratia payment to Murray and Calvey in view of the special circumstances that I have briefly outlined.

I should be glad, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would allow the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover of the Minister?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg)

11.27 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): It gives me this matter of major concern, to suppor for Preston (Mr. Thorne), who has spo of his constituent, Mr. Murray. I rise t of my constituent, Mr. Calvey. I am d hon. Friend the Member for South Ri present, because he covers the border Member for Preston and me.

The hon. Member for Preston h anxiety. I wrote to my right hon. Secretary on 16 December outlining th a major breakdown of confidence, as th have been let down badly. They were gi the police. They could not have been m their future and the possibility of IRA re confidence was betrayed.

The hon. Member for Preston has e that the men have lost their livelihood f have also suffered mental agony and t themselves and their families associated that have been spoken about.

I wrote often to the Home Office Mi Mr. Calvey moved from Wormwood S prison at Risley, to no avail. It was extre and expensive for Mrs. Calvey to Wormwood Scrubs to see her husband 15 minutes at a time. She did that regu confidence in her husband. I have met a Calvey about the circumstances relatin I am convinced that he is an absolutel down member of the community and th level best to get back into the construct delighted to say that he is taking steps

Therefore, it gives me great pleasure f hon. Member for Preston who admir matter. I sincerely believe that, in this payment is the only way to comp gentlemen.

11.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg) Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. D Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) for h for their respective constituents so clear is a matter of concern to them and to Both my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentl case lucidly and persuasively. I am no give, and shall not give, a final reply propose to set out some consideration that, as yet, no final conclusion has b points made by the hon. Member for P hon. Friend the Member for Chorley w be taken into account and given the w evidently deserve.

For reasons that I hope the House do not have a full knowledge of the ca asked the Lancashire police for a f

anticipate receiving one. It may be necessary to read the transcript of the case. The hon. Member for Preston, supported by my hon. Friend, referred to some of the major facts, but they bear repeating, at least in part, so that the case is put into its proper perspective.

Mr. Murray and Mr. Calvey were arrested in June 1985. The charges, as the hon. Member for Preston said, were under section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984—namely, withholding information and perverting the course of justice. The charges relate to a period in 1983, when it seems clear that both Mr. Murray and Mr. Calvey gave assistance to Patrick Magee and Mr. Murray's brother, Patrick Murray, in particular by driving them to various destinations. As I understood the hon. Member for Preston, the issue is not whether the assistance was rendered—I think it is accepted that it was—but, rather, whether it was done with the necessary criminal intent. That seems to be the main issue with which we are concerned. They were committed for trial on 20 November 1985. The trial took place between 7 and 15 October 1986. As we have heard, they were acquitted.

It is regrettable that these men should have been held in custody for such a long time. It is a great misfortune for them and it is an unsatisfactory aspect of our criminal system that, from time to time, events such as this happen. The Government are conscious of the need to tighten these periods. The House will know that, under the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, we took power to enable us to impose time limits. Without going into detail—this is not the most appropriate time to do so—we are about to apply statutory limits in three areas to try to combat the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley also made a point about location. It is true that he wrote to the Home Office a number of times to make representations on behalf of his constituent to the effect that he should be held in the north and not in the south. Prisoners remanded in custody to await trial at the Central Criminal Court—where these two gentlemen were tried—are normally located in or near London. The Home Office explored the possibility of making an exception on compassionate grounds, but I am afraid that it was not possible because the establishments in the northern region were severely overcrowded and were simply unable to take prisoners from other regions. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley for his steps to promote his constituent's interests.

While the two gentlemen were in custody, and as the hon. Member for Preston has reminded the House, applications for bail were made on no fewer than five occasions—once to the justices, twice to Preston Crown Court and twice to the Central Criminal Court. It is perhaps useful and necessary to note that the applications for bail were refused. The House, and you in particular, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know the circumstances in which applications for bail are refused. It is a matter for the court, not for Ministers or the Executive. It would be wrong for me to comment, save to say that on five separate occasions a court with jurisdiction declined to grant bail.

It is being said that the two men require and deserve compensation. It is important that we should determine the circumstances in which compensation is paid. As a general proposition, there is no statutory right to compensation in cases of this kind. People who feel that they have been done an injustice in terms of false imprisonment or malicious prosecution can comm civil proceedings. I recognise that, in many cases, t an illusory remedy, in the sense that it is not one that are likely to pursue. My right hon. Friend the H Secretary has made a statement by way of a written a setting out his approach to ex gratia payments compensation. The circumstances in which compens is payable are set out in *Hansard* in a written answ 29 November 1985.

I shall summarise the points that must be made. W dealing with a number of classes of cases. Let us begi those cases where there has been a conviction—wh not the case here—and it has gone to appeal. Ther power and discretion, and it has been the practice, to compensation where there has been a free pardon or the conviction is quashed by the Court of Appeal House of Lords following a reference of the case section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 or whe conviction is quashed by the Court of Appeal or the H of Lords following an appeal out of time. But the qua of the conviction must be founded on some new fact shows conclusively that there has been a miscarria justice. I appreciate that this case does not fall within criteria. I mention it so that the House has this ma the proper perspective.

A different situation arises where, as in the presen there was an acquittal. It is not my practice to read the Dispatch Box, but this point perhaps needs stat is important that we should have the phraseology in I would like to remind the House of the principle apply in cases where there has been an acquitta written answer to which I have referred states:

"There may be exceptional circumstances that compensation in cases outside these categories"—

largely those to which I have referred.

"In particular, facts may emerge at trial, or on within time, that completely exonerate the accused pe am prepared, in principle, to pay compesation to peop have spent a period in custody or have been imprisc cases such as this. I will not, however, be prepared compensation simply because at the trial or on app prosecution was unable to sustain the burden of proof t a reasonable doubt in relation to the specific charge th brought."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1985; Vol *689-90.*]

It is plain from that answer, which reflects Government policy, that the mere fact that there h an acquittal does not give rise to any clai compensation. That may be wrong as a mat principle, but if we want to change it we must do statute and the House must decide that that is w want to do. However, that is not the law as it st present. The fact that someone has spent a long prison on remand is not a justification for cl compensation. It must go beyond that. My righ Friend the Secretary of State said that the facts m example, "completely exonerate" the accused Although I am the first to realise that when a pe acquitted he is in one sense exonerated, it is quite pla that phrase in my right hon. Friend's answer is d from a mere acquittal. If we do not like it, we change it by statute, but we have not, as a Hous that.

The mere fact of the acquittal does not bring within the range of those that have an obvious cl compensation. The mere fact of this length of custody on remand does not do so, although I acc it is regrettable that that should have happene

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

representations to which the hon. Member for Preston referred do not fall obviously within the scope of the written answer and certainly the loss of income, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley referred, does not.

Mr. Stan Thorne: I am following closely what the Minister is saying. I appreciate the points that he has made. Would he consider that the circumstances in this case, which arise from the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, the questioning by the police and the comments made by the men in terms of what happened, would be embraced by the references he has made in regard to the prospects for compensation?

Mr. Hogg: No, I would not. I accept that it is a discretionary remedy and it does lie within the power of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to go beyond what he has already said. However, what he has said in his written answer shows clearly his approach. It is an exceptional remedy that can arise only in exceptional circumstances. The circumstances that I for one would contemplate are when it is wholly plain that the person could not have committed the offence, because, for example, an offence was never committed, or it could not have been committed by the defendant because he was in France when the offence happened in Brighton.

That is not the case here. This case is an acquittal, the jury, as I understand it, having determined that they were not satisfied that the defendant, who did certain admitted acts, had the necessary criminal intent. On the face of it, that does not fall within the scope of the discretionary power that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has described.

I should like to say to the hon. Member for Preston and my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley that we shall give very serious consideration to the points that they both put so clearly, but at first blush, and without having had the full police report, and without having had the transcript, I have to say that it is not obvious to me that the case falls within the accepted parameters. The representations so carefully and persuasively put will be considered carefully, but I cannot in all honesty go beyond that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 22 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time upon Thursday 29 January.

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 29 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Surplus

1. **Mr. Powley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action is being taken to reduce surpluses of food in Europe, beyond that announced on 17 December.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): I continue to take every opportunity to promote necessary reforms of common agricultural policy regimes which are for products in surplus or which involve excessive expenditure.

Mr. Powley: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the whole House on the settlement that he recently achieved in distributing surpluses of butter, beef, milk and sugar? Does he agree that this is a practical demonstration of a caring Government? Will he tell the House how he intends to achieve the distribution of the food surpluses and when that distribution will take place? Will he also assure me that constituents in Norwich will receive their allocation of the surpluses?

Mr. Jopling: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. We are moving as fast as we can to make this food available. I cannot say exactly when it will happen in Norwich, but we hope that the first food will be made available next week. Only today I heard from the Commissioner's office in Brussels that, subject to availabiltiy, the products concerned are to be provided to a collection point convenient to the organisation—that is, the charity—in the quantities and in a form that it can use, and all reasonable costs up to that point will be borne by FEOGA.

Mr. Hardy: Has there not been the most astonishing negligence on the part of the Government in their preparations to deal with this nettle of surpluses? What steps has the Minister taken to ensure that, when the nettle is grasped, Britain and British farmers will not be stung far more than their continental competitors?

Mr. Jopling: As the hon. Gentleman's question was rather vague, I am not too sure whether he was referring to the food that we are making available or to the general agreement that we made in December. The December settlement was an extremely good one for Britain. We were able to preserve many of the most valuable parts of our support system, not least the continuation for two years of the beef variable premium scheme.

Mr. Shersby: I welcome the scheme to distribute EEC food stocks to those in need, but why is it proposed to transport thousands of tonnes of sugar from intervention stocks stored in 50 kg bags in Italy when there is an adequate supply of sugar in Britain to enable British companies to supply consumers with 1 kg bags? Also, how is it proposed that the charities concerned will distribute the stocks of meat and butter that are held in cold storage?

Mr. Jopling: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that we had our first meeting with the charities on Tuesday—the day that the Council of Ministers agreed the matter. We have had a further meeting with the charities today and they are enthusiastic about making the scheme work. In relation to sugar, the plans are still being worked out, so I think that my hon. Friend is a little premature.

Mr. Tony Banks: Has the Minister seen the amazing story that Lord Avebury wishes to donate his body to Battersea Dogs Home?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this a food surplus?

Mr. Banks: It is indeed, Mr. Speaker. In the event of this practice catching on, will the Minister give an undertaking that we shall not have an EEC mountain of dead Liberals?

Mr. Jopling: As I have been in the House a little longer than the hon. Gentleman, I had the misfortune to sit here with the noble Lord. Having heard what he had to say when he was in this House, no nonsense that he talks now comes as any surprise to me whatsoever.

Mr. Alexander: I do not wish to embarass my right hon. Friend, but does not my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) have a point? What guarantee can I give my constituents in Newark that any of the surpluses will reach them, and soon?

Mr. Jopling: I had the great pleasure of addressing farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency only a very short time ago. We hope to have the food moving next week. We are awaiting the final rules and regulations from the Commission. Until we receive them, we are not in a position to move. My hon. Friend may have read in the press, however, that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State was present when the first butter was taken out of the cold store yesterday to start the thawing out process.

Dr. Godman: Is it not economically stupid to accept sugar imported from Italy when we have enough sugar in Britain to supply people in need? There is a cane sugar refinery in my constituency that would be able very effectively to package and distribute sugar in 1 kg bags.

Mr. Jopling: As there is no sugar in intervention stores in this country, no plans have been finalised as to how the scheme will work in relation to sugar, but I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has just told us.

Mr. Gale: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement, although why the elderly and those in need should be denied access to wine and cheese I am not quite sure, as in some parts of the Community they are regarded as staple diet. My right hon. Friend said that the food would be distributed through charitable agencies. As many people are unable to get to those agencies, will he ensure that there is adequate publicity to make sure that those in need receive the goods that will become available?

Mr. Jopling: Perhaps I can correct my hon. Friend. Cheese is part of the scheme [HON. MEMBERS: "What about wine?"] We can all make jokes about wine. They have been made for many years in this House. As for the rest of my hon. Friend's question, we shall do our utmost to get things moving as soon as we can.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that this morning I was in touch with my successors at Age Concern, Scotland and that they were under the impression that the scheme involved the delivery of all the foodstuffs to centres where there were cooking facilities, with the implication that meals or cooked food would be provided for the elderly and those in need? Our understanding, however, and the impression created by the Minister, is that food will be delivered to individual old people. Will the Minister clear up that point? Will deliveries be made to the homes of elderly people and those in need, or will those involved have to go to food centres and have it doled out to them as though it were some kind of poor law soup kitchen?

Mr. Jopling: Many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues have asked for this food to be made available to needy people. I am sorry that when we have such a scheme the only thing that the hon. Gentleman can do is to carp about it. We are hoping to distribute this food to people through, for instance, the meals on wheels service and in other ways. We are working as quickly and as hard as we can with the charities responsible for doing this. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the statement that I received earlier today from the Commissioner's office. It said that the food would be provided at a collection point convenient to the charity in quantities and in a form that it could use.

Mr. Harris: In looking to the future and devising means of controlling surpluses, will my right hon. Friend reject out of hand the crazy suggestion by the Leader of the SDP for a two-tier system for grain? Has my right hon. Friend taken note of the immediate reaction of the president of the National Farmers Union, Mr. Simon Gourlay, who told the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) that he did not even begin to comprehend the SDP leader's scheme and that it would lead to the annihilation of British farming?

Mr. Jopling: I think that my hon. Friend has repeated almost exactly the words of the president of the National Farmers Union about the extraordinary comments made in the Bledisloe lecture by the leader of the SDP. My only comment is that it must have been the most damaging policy proposal in living memory by any party in this country.

Mr. John: Understandably, the House does not yet have details of the food distribution scheme, but am I right in understanding that the total amount allocated for the scheme Europewide is £38 million? If that is right, it means that our share, both for the amount of food and for the cost of preparation of that food into a form in which it can be distributed, is about £3 million.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission announcement earlier this week said that there would be a review if the cost of the scheme appeared to be going beyond 50 million ecus, which in pounds sterling is not far from the figure that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. There is no expecific allocation to any one country. At the moment it is on a first-come-first-served basis. I do not think that any other Community country could show that it is further ahead with its plans than we are.

Mr. Bill Walker: Has my right hon. Friend yet had an opportunity to study in detail the proposals by the Labour party, which seem designed to remove the surpluses by levying a rates tax on agricultural land? In Scotland that would certainly be a most effective way of driving farmers off the land.

Mr. Jopling: I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that matter. While the Labour party proposal does not compete for one moment with the horrors for the farming industry contained in the speech by the SDP leader the other day, I hope that our farmers will look carefully at the implications of the Labour party's policy on the re-rating of agricultural land, the nationalisation of agricultural land and stringent new planning policies.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister not recognise that his existing policy on cereals, relying as it does upon continuing high levels of production, and his record of total failure to bring supply and demand into anything like balance, is a disastrous policy which fails to discriminate between users and producers and has not protected British farmers? Is it not time that he brought new thinking to the problem of surplus cereal disposal?

Mr. Jopling: I suppose that the hon. Gentleman was one of the architects of his right hon. Friend's absurd speech. The leader of his party said that the vast majority of grain farmers in the community would be unaffected. He did not say that 44,000 of the 94,000 United Kingdom producers would be affected. That is a most discriminatory policy for British agriculture. It means that annual revenue for the average United Kingdom grain producer with 42 hectares of cereals will drop by £6,000 a year.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed a long run of questions on this because of the implications for hon. Members' constituents, but we must now move on more rapidly.

Fertilisers

2. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies have been conducted by his Department on the use of nitrogen-based fertilisers on farms and their effects on water catchment areas.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): My Department is undertaking a number of studies aimed at enabling nitrogen fertilisers to be used more efficiently and reducing the nitrate available for leaching to water.

These include studies specifically designed to provide better information on leaching losses from a range of different crop and management practices.

Mr. Weetch: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he realise that there is widespread and growing public concern about the level of nitrate pollution in parts of this country and that an important source of that pollution is nitrogen-based fertilisers? Is he aware that in a study by the Department of the Environment published last December East Anglis was classified as one of the worst polluted areas in the country? Does he agree that as the need for massive surpluses is well and truly over the Government should be maintaining stringent controls on the level of nitrate pollution? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Thompson: I know of the hon. Gentleman's great interest in this matter, both within his constituency, which is probably why he asked the question, and on a wider basis. The Ministry fully understands the implications of nitrogen pollution and has already set in hand a series of studies, including work on the efficiency of the use of fertilisers and the uptake of soil-derived nitrogen, the response of grazed permanent grassland to nitrogen fertilisers, predicting fertiliser needs for individual farms, modelling the interaction of nitrate leaching, the need for denitrification of agricultural soils and leaching losses from different crop rotations, management practices and soils. We are working with the DHHS, the NFU, the Country Landowners Association and others along the lines suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the importance of the work being undertaken at the National Vegetable Research Station in computer modelling of nitrogen usage by crops, which is pointing the way to reduced pollution? Is he aware that as a result of the arrangements it has made with the growers, as things now stand the Horticultural Development Council will have available to fund this and other important areas of research only half the amount previously indicated by the Ministry? Will the Minister restore the missing £1 million?

Mr. Thompson: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern about the horticulture industry and the institute which I believe is based in his constituency. Research and development are important, and it is doubly important that those who benefit from research and development also contribute to it.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister tell the House which parts of the country are unlikely to comply with the EEC directive?

Mr. Thompson: The way in which we implement EEC directives will mean that all parts of the country will comply with them.

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

3. **Mr. Jackson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was achieved during his presidency of the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

15. **Mr. Key** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress in the reform of the common agricultural policy was made during his presidency of the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Jopling: The Council in December took an important step towards the necessary reform of the common agricultural policy. During the course of our presidency the Council also agreed on a number of measures contributing to the completion of the internal market.

Mr. Jackson: Will my right hon. Friend accept warm congratulations from Conservative Members on his success in securing further steps towards realism in the common agricultural policy? With regard to recent proposals for a two-tier pricing system for cereals, does my right hon. Friend agree that while a social policy for European agriculture is necessary, if it is to be acceptable and equitable it cannot be based on the sort of flat rate concept that appears to be advocated by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), but must be tailored to the particular circumstances and structures of each member state?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend has made his point accurately. If the policies outlined by the alliance leader the other day were put into effect, 75 per cent. of the Community's grain production would qualify for the full support price, but in the United Kingdom only 30 per cent. would qualify.

Mr. Key: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as being a successful start to tackling the problem of surpluses, his set-aside scheme has a welcome environmental impact?

Mr. Jopling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said, because in December we agreed, among other things, the general principles of the socio-structural package, which opens the door much further than before to the implementation of our ideas for putting land aside from producing grain that we can neither eat nor sell.

Mr. Deakins: Why was there no mention in the Minister of State's statement on that agreement to the House on 17 December of the fact that the bulk of the saving in the milk sector will come from delayed reimbursement to member states of the cost of disposing of surplus dairy produce? There is not a word about that. Why did the Minister seek to mislead the House on that important issue when more than 100 per cent. of the saving is being thrust on to member states and is not a net saving to the policy?

Mr. Jopling: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman says that. If he looks at *Hansard* he will see that my right hon. Friend made it clear in his statement of 17 December that the cost of the additional programme of stock disposal for butter would be met over the four years beginning in 1989. The provision in the proposed budgets for 1987 and 1988 for those disposals will not, therefore, be used. That will result in a saving this year and next. From 1989 there will be large and increasing savings to the budget as a result of the milk package, even when the certificate of disposals has been met.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister consider the plight of beef suckler cow producers? Will he match the £6 that he obtained from the Community with the £6 that he is allowed to give per head on the beef suckler cow premium in Britain? In particular, will he reverse his decision on hill livestock compensatory allowances for beef suckler cows?

Mr. Jopling: We shall certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's point on the suckler cow subsidy, although

we have already made our announcement about the hill livestock compensatory amounts. I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman is pitching his question about beef when everybody else is particularly interested in his party's policy on grain.

Sir Paul Hawkins: I sincerely congratulate my right hon. Friend on his tremendous achievement in the EEC, but what does he believe the fall in the value per carcase of beef will be over the next couple of years? It is estimated by some people that it will be £50 per carcase. Will he do anything to fill the gap for those two years so that we do not lose our stock of beef up to that point?

Mr. Jopling: I remind the hon. Gentleman that some tough steps were taken with regard to the beef sector, which has been costing an enormous amount of money and considerably overreached last year's beef budget. I remind my hon. Friend that as part of the settlement that we achieved in December we managed to obtain a 6 per cent. devaluation of the green pound for beef. By the harmonisation of bull and steer prices, that figure was equivalent to a price rise for British beef producers of about another 3 per cent. The effect of the weakening of intervention, which has always been a system barely used in Britain compared with other countries—2 per cent. in Britain compared with 25 per cent. for beef in Ireland—puts the hon. Gentleman's point in rather better perspective.

Mr. John: Necessary as the 17 December decisions were as a start, will the Minister confirm that that merely cuts the overrun on the agricultural budget from 3·5 mecu to 2·5 mecu next year?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, I would not attempt to deny that the hon. Gentleman is entirely right, but we still have a long way to go to deal with the danger of overspending on the agricultural budget during 1987. No doubt Ministers will be very much applying their minds to that during the price-fixing negotiations in the next few weeks.

Sir Adam Butler: Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about the set-aside proposals? What form will they take, and when are decisions likely to be made? In particular, will my right hon. Friend accept that there should be a voluntary element in any scheme, whereby farmers with good land are able to participate just as well as those with poor land?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, we have always envisaged that our scheme would be voluntary at farm level, but that the whole scheme must be compulsorily available in each country within the Community. We believe that it should be available for any farmers who feel that it would be in the interests to take it. However, I envisage that farmers who find grain-growing to be at only marginal levels of profitability would find it more attractive.

Dairy Products

4. **Mr. Torney** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of national consumption of dairy products is met by domestic production.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): The extent to which our consumption of dairy products is met by domestic production varies from product to product. But in 1985 domestic production of butterfat and solids not fat, two main components of milk, was equivalent to 89 cent. and 113 per cent. respectively of total dome production.

Mr. Torney: Why did we have 269,000 tonnes of Uni Kingdom butter in intervention in August 1986—a per cent. increase on the previous six months? Why do still import some 70,000 tonnes of butter from fellow E countries when we are cutting milk production in Brita

Mr. Gummer: Because we live in a democracy a people are allowed to choose the butter that they want buy. If the British housewife chooses to buy butter ma in another country, she must have the right so to do. I wa to see an attempt in Britain to get the British housewife realise that British butter is the best in the world.

Mr. Cockeram: Will my right hon. Friend confirm th according to the figures for the last year for which they a available, over 40 per cent. of butter produced in Brit was sold into intervention? Therefore, is it not time th the Milk Marketing Board gave less emphasis computers and statistics and more emphasis to the purpo for which it was set up, which was incorporated in its tit marketing, thereby better serving the hardworking Briti milk producer?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has made a me important point. How can we argue against cuts in quot in Britain if we put such a large amount of the milk th we produce into intervention?

Mr. Home Robertson: In the course of the negotiatio on milk, has there ever been any consideration of spec provision for those regions which are net importers milk? Does it not add insult to injury for regions, or some cases nations, to see reductions and losses in jobs dairy farms and in creameries at the same time as they s more and more imported butter in their shops?

Mr. Gummer: I think the hon. Gentleman will acce that many of the countries in the EC make su arguments. We have decided that we must bear the burde of Community costs right across the Community, not on because so many could argue in that way, but because w find ourselves wishing to export our surpluses in oth products to other Community countries.

Agricultural Support

5. **Mr. Conway** asked the Minister of Agricultur Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of th effect on agriculture of supporting only standa quantities of production.

Mr. Gummer: I assume that my hon. Friend is referri to the ideas put forward by the SDP/Liberal allian whereby farmers would get a support price for only certain quantity of production. As outlined, this schem would mean that CAP support would go to only about or third of United Kingdom cereals production, yet woul apply to as much as 80 per cent. of continental productio Under the scheme two thirds of our cereal productio could well become uneconomic. The effects of th proposals of the right hon. Member for Plymouth Devonport (Dr. Owen) on our rural economy would b catastrophic.

Mr. Conway: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend fo his reply. Will he assure the House that any idea o

introducing quotas on cereals or limitations on a per farm basis would be damaging to British farming interests? While he and his right hon. Friends have been most tenacious in defending British interests in the European negotiations, *[Interruption]*—irrespective of how boring or embarrassing this may be for Members of the alliance—may I ask him to spell out clearly to the farming community the effect on its income if it follows the proposals of the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend might be interested to know that the likely effect on the annual cereal income of British cereal farmers would be £850 million. That would be the effect of the policy put forward by the SDP and supported by the Liberal party spokesman for agriculture when he spoke to the Farmers Union of Wales.

Mr. Maclennan: Why do Agriculture Ministers this afternoon find it necessary to misrepresent the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and fail to draw attention to the fact that he made it clear that any such scheme would depend crucially upon a tough negotiating stance on the issue of the British share of the cereals market? Does he not realise the weakness of the Government's position on national shares in the light of their failure to secure a fair share for British milk producers?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend made absolutely clear exactly the point at which the cut-off would take place, in advance of the negotiations. He told us the figures. All we have done is to work out the figures which he gave at Cirencester to an audience which included the president of the National Farmers Union, who said about the right hon. Gentleman that he clearly did not understand the matter at all and that his proposals were utterly catastrophic. The hon. Gentleman must go back to his right hon. Friend and ask him why he is not here to defend himself.

Agricultural Land and Buildings

6. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the effect on farm incomes and food prices of de-rating agricultural land and buildings.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I estimate that in broad terms the value to the farming industry of the derating of agricultural land and buildings might amount to some £430 million. However, if agriculture was brought into the rating system the effect on farm incomes, and on food prices, might be very different, as this would depend on the response of individual farmers to such a massive additional burden.

Mr. Moynihan: Will my hon. Friend confirm that any policy that sought to rate or tax agricultural land, as evidenced by the policies of the Opposition parties, would substantially increase the cost of food to the consumers, which should be a matter of importance to every hon. Member in this House?

Mr. Thompson: I confirm that if agricultural land were to be rated or taxed in the ways that the alliance say there would be an additional burden, lower profits, more unemployment and higher food prices.

Mr. Allen McKay: Would the Minister care to give an assessment of the effects of de-rating in Lewisham, East?

Mr. Thompson: The people of Lewisham are eating more cheaply because agricultural land in this country is not yet rated.

Milk Quotas

7. **Mr. Harris** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures will be taken to compensate dairy producers for cuts in quota and related measures.

Mr. Jopling: Compensation under the European Community outgoers scheme has been increased by 50 per cent. to a total of 27·5p per litre, payable over seven years. In addition, compensation of 6·5p per litre per year will be paid for the 4 per cent. temporary suspension of quota.

Mr. Harris: Although I in no way minimise the impact of quotas and the toughening up of quotas on the farming industry, and indeed on the whole rural economy, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend agrees that the compensation to which he has referred provides something of a reasonable cushion for the problems presented by those cuts?

Mr. Jopling: That is right. The compensation of 6·5p a litre for the temporary suspension must be compared with the profitability of milk at 3p and 4p a litre. As my hon. Friend says, the compensation is generous by any standard.

Miss Maynard: Does the Minister agree that not only dairy farmers but dairy workers on the farm suffer from milk quotas? Does he accept that, in 1984-85, there was a threefold decrease in the full-time labour force in the counties with the highest milk production compared with previous years? Is it not high time that farm workers who lose their jobs because of milk quotas were compensated beyond the redundancy payments scheme, especially as some of the older farm workers will never get another job?

Mr. Jopling: The purpose of quota cuts is to eliminate surpluses and to secure a viable future for the dairy industry as a whole. I accept that that will be a painful process. It could involve job losses, but the extent of job losses is not yet clear. I do not think, according to the evidence of the changes during the previous round of quotas and the reduction in milk production, that there was a huge number of redundancies among farm workers. There were some, but I think that the hon. Lady will agree that it was not a huge number.

Mr. Hicks: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that should the existing voluntary outgoers scheme for milk fail to achieve the objective of a 2 per cent. reduction producers would still receive the 27·5p a litre payment under any subsequent compulsory scheme?

Mr. Jopling: No. I think that that would not be possible under the Community's rules. I hope that the new arrangements and the increased outgoers payments—whereby a producer with a 40-cow herd would receive £7,800 a year for seven years compared with £5,200 a year for seven years under the previous arrangements—will allow us to spend all this money paying people to go out of milk production so that we do not need to reduce the quotas of those who wish to remain in it.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Will the Minister and his agriculture colleagues address the issue of the transfer of quotas

between regions and nations in the United Kingdom? Is he aware of the concern that the increased potential number of bankruptcies among farmers may result in quotas being sold separately from farms, thereby increasing the transfer of quotas?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman might like to study the settlement that was made. He would find that, although the Commission proposed that the transfer between regions should be eliminated, in the end we agreed to allow those transfers to remain.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Andy Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect on farm incomes of the changes in arrangements for intervention buying of beef and support of production.

Mr. Gummer: The agreement reached in December reduces the price levels at which intervention buying is triggered and will set buying prices at levels related to market prices. But we in the United Kingdom have relied more on the operation of the variable premium to secure our producers' returns. This is being extended for two years and payments have already been increased by 5 per cent. as a result of the devaluation of the green pound.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has given some figures which will mean that farmers will receive £35 a head less. Farmers have always lived in the real world, but they would like to know why Irish farmers have access to our deficiency payments, thereby undermining prices here?

Mr. Gummer: The situation is difficult, but it appears that the price of Irish beef will decrease by £70 a head, compared with the figure given by my hon. Friend. German farmers will receive £119 a head less, Italian farmers about £115 a head less and French farmers between £85 and £45 a head less, depending on whether they are bulls or steers. In this difficult situation the United Kingdom has come out very much better than other countries in the European Community.

Mr. John: Has the Minister calculated by how much it will accelerate self-sufficiency in the sheepmeat regime if beef producers switch to sheep production?

Mr. Gummer: Various things cause people to move into sheep farming, so the direct effect cannot be shown. The hon. Gentleman is right. So long as there are major surpluses in some areas and not in others there will be a tendency to create surpluses where they do not presently exist.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the House is grateful for the devaluation of the green pound which was secured in the December negotiations in the Community? Does he recognise the important part played in the rural economy by the hill livestock farmer and the hill suckler cow herd? Will he monitor carefully the consequences on farm incomes in this particularly valuable sector of the rural economy?

Mr. Gummer: We shall certainly do that carefully. I hope that my hon. Friend will remind the farming industry that the United Kingdom Government achieved a better deal for beef farmers than did any other Government in the European Community.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. Mr. Butterfill asked the Prime Minister if sh list her official engagements for Thursday 22 Janua

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet an meetings with ministerial colleagues and other addition to my duties in this House I shall be h further meetings later today.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend recal when, on 29 July last year, the Financial Services Bi the insider provisions in it were being debated by noble Lordships, the noble and learned Lord described the insider trading investigation provisio both enormous and draconian? So draconian were that he thought they exceeded the principles of n justice. Does my right hon. Friend not find it surp that Opposition parties should take the attitude tha do over revelations of insider trading today which probably never have come to light if the legislation ha been enacted?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes his point. I remind the House that this Government are committed to rooting out financial wrongdoing wh it occurs, because this Government made insider tr a criminal offence and provided that upon convict should carry a prison sentence.

Mr. Kinnock: You will know, Mr. Speaker, that d the course of this morning you, and we, took what a we could to uphold the Government's view tha showing of a particular film would prejudice nat security. It is now apparent that earlier today a mag published what we understand to be the substance o film and that the 1 o'clock ITN news covered the m in illustrated detail. Given the failure of the Govern to take effective action to prevent publication of ma prejudicial to national security, will the Prime Minist us what she now proposes to do to try to mitigat effects of the Government's incompetence?

The Prime Minister: I understand the position to follows: yesterday the Attorney-General obtained i High Court an interim injunction restraining Mr. Du Campbell or his servants or agents from disclosin publishing or causing or permitting to be disclose published to any person all or any of the inform within his knowledge about a defence project. You, Speaker, have ruled upon this matter. With regard t specific matters which the right hon. Gentleman raise right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-Gener giving consideration to the *New Statesman* article. I sh point out that, in any case, one action that undern national security does not justify another. In meantime, I am sure that the whole House will wi uphold your authority, Mr. Speaker. Furthermo understand that my right hon. Friend the Leader o House will have something to say about this matter this afternoon.

Mr. Kinnock: I agree fully with the Prime Minister one breach, or threatened breach, does not justify a fu breach. Yesterday the Government properly took ou injunction against Mr. Campbell, but if they thought

it covered all eventualities, why did they have to go back to court this morning? Is it not the case that the injunction covered neither publication nor the showing of the film? I repeat my question: what will the Prime Minister do now to mitigate that incompetence?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman heard the terms of the injunction. The interim injunction was granted restraining Mr. Duncan Campbell or his servants or agents from disclosing or publishing or causing or permitting to be disclosed or published to any person all or any of the information within his knowledge. Regarding matters in the House, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware, there are specific circumstances when the courts will say that the matter is for Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker has ruled and I hope that the House will wish to uphold his authority. I feel sure that the right hon. Gentleman will wish to uphold the authority of the Speaker and that he will carry all his party with him. Unfortunately for all of us, some people seem to be more interested in trying to ferret out and reveal information of use to our enemies than in preserving—*[Interruption.]*—our defence interests and thus the freedom which we all enjoy.

Mr. Kinnock: Naturally, we fully uphold your ruling, Mr. Speaker. As the Prime Minister knows, this morning we did whatever was possible with complete readiness to try to ensure that if the Government sought to take action in court it would not be impeded by proceedings in the House. On that basis I must ask the Prime Minister why the Government took no action when it was clear for days that there was a strong possibility of the usual habit of the viewing of a film in the House? Why was that delayed until this morning? Why did the Government delay until yesterday seeking to take action against Mr. Campbell? Why did they fail to secure the prevention of the publication in a magazine? Those details are now out. What will the Prime Minister do to mitigate the effects on national security?

The Prime Minister: The Government took out and obtained an interim injunction yesterday, the terms of which I have made clear. A question arose about matters relating to the House upon which it was necessary to take action this morning, and the Government took that action. The matter was referred to Mr. Speaker, who made a ruling which I understand the right hon. Gentleman will uphold. I hope that he will carry all his party with him. As I have said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is giving consideration to the *New Statesman* article.

Mr. Heseltine: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that we are concerned, not with the competence of the Government, but with the irresponsibility of an organ of Left-wing opinion? Does she further recognise that this is one more example of the failure of the Left to distinguish between the privilege of freedom of speech and a licence to peddle the nation's security?

The Prime Minister: I wholly agree with my right hon. Friend. Unfortunately, there are people who try to use freedom in order to destroy freedom.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Reverting to a previous question, may I ask whether the Prime Minister is aware that the director of corporate finance at Morgan Grenfell, who resigned recently, is a former director general of the Takeover panel? Is she further aware that the chief executive at Morgan Grenfell who resigned — *[Interruption.]* is a former member of staff of the Bank of England? If people from these backgrounds — *[Interruptions.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to allow the hon. Gentleman to finish his question.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If people from these backgrounds can be responsible for such serious shortcomings in that institution, does the Prime Minister not agree that there is an overwhelming case for more independent supervision of the City now that the Government have allowed untrammelled competition there, after the big bang? Will the Prime Minister consider introducing more independent supervision than that contained in the Financial Services Bill?

The Prime Minister: With regard to what the hon. Gentleman said about a particular bank, he knows that these matters are under investigation, and if he has any information to lay he should lay it before the appropriate authorities.

With regard to the action that this Government have taken, we have done more than any previous Government to try to root out fraud, wherever it occurs. In that regard we are still putting amendments through the House to current Bills to take further action, and in some places those amendments are being criticised for their severity. We shall take every action that we can to try to root out fraud, wherever it occurs.

Mr. Franks: Bearing in mind the debate earlier this week on the north-south divide and the Opposition's proposals to tackle unemployment in the north, is my right hon. Friend aware of the recent decision by Barrow district council to declare Barrow, of all places, a nuclear weapon-free zone? What words of comfort can my right hon. Friend offer to the 3,000 people and employees in the area who last month added to their existing shareholdings in Vickers?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made his point very effectively. I may add the point that the shipyard flourishes. It is in charge of and responsible for building the new Trident submarines which will hold the nuclear deterrent that is vital to our security. Those employees, along with many other people if they are interested in defence and national security, must be interested in returning a Conservative Government for a very long time in the future.

Q2. **Mr. Cabora** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cabora: Is the Prime Minister aware that on the ITN lunchtime news yesterday there was report about the arrest of Kelvin Chapman in connection with the vicious stabbing of the little girl down at Margate? In that broadcast it was said that the media had been asked to keep the name confidential. Unfortunately——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the sub judice rule, in respect of this case.

Mr. Cabora: I will. Only one newspaper in the country released that name, *The Sun*. Despite the fact that it had

been specifically asked not to release the name, *The Sun* newspaper did so. Will the Prime Minister join with me in condemning this Murdoch publication for releasing that name and undermining the police operation? A quotation from the Maidstone police was that

"the police are furious with *The Sun* newspaper".

Will the Prime Minister condemn that Murdoch publication for this irresponsible action?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the case is sub judice, but I make it clear that when requests of that kind are made I believe that they should be honoured.

Mr. Rowe: In the light of yet another horrific and fatal accident on the M2 yesterday, will my right hon. Friend take time today to commend the majority of heavy goods vehicle drivers who drive with care and discretion, and condemn those who seem to think that it is either clever or funny to harass smaller vehicles by driving much too close to them?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I gladly join my hon. Friend in thanking and congratulating those lorry drivers, and others, who have driven carefully, as we all should, on the motorways. I should also like to thank the many people who, during the very severe weather, made great efforts to get to their places of work to carry out their jobs.

Q3. **Mr. Snape** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Snape: Was the Prime Minister aware of, and will she comment on, the telephone call made last Sunday by the press office at No. 10 Downing street to Mr. David Stevens, the chairman of United Newspapers, berating him for the publication in the *Star* of the roll of dishonour of Ministers and Conservative Members who defeated the private Member's Bill last Friday? Does the Prime Minister think that it is a proper use of public funds for a civil servant such as Mr. Bernard Ingham to bribe, berate and blackmail — *[Interruption.]* — to bribe, berate and blackmail that small section of the Fleet street press which does not already kowtow to the right hon. Lady?

The Prime Minister: I know of no such telephone call. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Snape: I do.

The Prime Minister: As I understand that hon. Members—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: As I understand that hon. Members who ask such questions are responsible for the facts which they allege, I challenge the hon. Gentleman to give me the evidence. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

Mr. Snape *rose*——

Mr. Robin Cook: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise out of questions?

Mr. Cook: You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that you served a ruling on me this morning preventing me from proceeding with a private showing to me and colleagues of the BBC banned film. Your ruling turned on the injunction which was granted yesterday against Duncan Campbell. You will be aware that I and my colleagues have, of course, observed your ruling, but no chance to discuss that ruling with you has co you will understand that we wish to p considerations why we would invite you to ref ruling. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I believe perfectly in order if I put such considerations Speaker. May I put to you two considerations not have been available to you when you made this morning?

First, this morning, an application was m Attorney-General for an injunction against other named Members of Parliament to p showing of this film. That application, which been made quite rightly, was also quite rightly by the courts. As the same judge who granted injunction has declined to grant a specific extens injunction to encompass those named M Parliament, may I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, th be open to you to reconsider your ruling, as the granted the injunction on which you found has to specify the Members of Parliament covere injunction?

The second consideration that I should like you, Mr. Speaker, to invite you to reflect on you is that, since you made your ruling, it has becom clear that the information in the film that we w to see is public knowledge and is widely dissemi not merely through the medium of the *New Sta* was also the lead story at lunchtime today on sector television channel.

It is clear from the information now in domain that the film raises matters of considera concern, such as, was the expenditure an ap charge on the Defence budget, and were under Parliament contravened? These are matt Parliament should have an opportunity to consi make up its mind about. More important, it eccentric if Members of Parliament were to themselves the opportunity to consider informat is now widely available to our constituents and w be obtained on any bookstall in any railway Great Britain.

In the light of these two developments, Mr. may I invite you to consider your ruling and, if to reflect upon it overnight and come back, I h a decision that will enable the House to conside important issues of public policy raised by the

Mr. Hayes: Further to that point of or Speaker. We heard the Leader of the Opposition moments ago that he abides by your ruling. We h as well that he abides by the injunction that wa for by Her Majesty's Government. Yet now we h from one of his closest advisers, the hon. Me Livingston (Mr. Cook), who seeks to challe ruling. Perhaps we could have a full statement Labour party.

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter of very con importance to the whole House. Perhaps the H allow me to say a word about it.

I was told yesterday evening that hon. intended to show a film in the House which had subject of a High Court injunction preventing its This raised issues which I believe the House will it to determine in relation to the rooms in the Pala

the control of the House. To provide time for this to be done, I gave instructions that nothing should occur to prejudice the position until the House itself had an opportunity to discuss the matter.

As I say, this is a matter for the House, but the House was not sitting at 11 o'clock this morning when it was intended to show the film. Therefore, urgent administrative action had to be taken, and that is what I authorised. The House should now consider the matter in due course and make its own determination.

The precise application of an injunction is a matter of law. What I was doing was to ensure that, whatever the scope of its application, the injunction should be observed within our precincts until such time as the House makes its own determination on the matter.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): It might be helpful if I indicate that the Government recognise that this is a topic of the utmost importance which the House should have the opportunity to debate at an early date. The matter is now being prosecuted through the usual channels.

Business of the House

3.37 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 26 JANUARY—Timetable motion on the Local Government Finance Bill followed by completion of remaining stages of the Bill.

TUESDAY 27 JANUARY—Opposition Day (6th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Failure of the City to serve the Nation".

Motions relating to the Dockyard Services (Devonport) (Designation and Appointed Day) Order and the Dockyard Services (Rosyth) (Designation and Appointed Day) Order.

WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY — Second Reading of the Ministry of Defence Police Bill (Lords) followed by Second Reading of the Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners Bill.

Motion on the London Regional Transport (Levy) Order.

THURSDAY 29 JANUARY—There will be a debate on a Government motion to take note of the White Paper on developments in the European Community January-June 1986 (Cmnd. No. 9911).

FRIDAY 30 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 2 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

The Leader of the House has announced that the Government will next week introduce a guillotine motion to curtail scrutiny on a local government Bill that is highly technical and contains unprecedented provisions that place the Secretary of State for the Environment above the law and afford him both retrospective and future protection from further legal challenges. How can the Government justify proceeding with such haste when they have already tabled over 40 substantial amendments to their Bill and are even now compiling more? Will those further amendments be tabled today so that they can be properly scrutinised and, if necessary, amended on Report? If they are not tabled today, how can the House fairly give attention to them on Monday of next week?

Today's Order Paper gives notice of a further rate support grant Bill. I understand that the Vote Office is saying that the Bill will not be available to hon. Members until tomorrow. That treats the House with contempt, and makes nonsense of the Government's claim last year that the Rate Support Grant Act that received Royal Assent in October would clarify the law on rate support grant settlements. All this creates a climate of great uncertainty for local government of all political colours, and makes the delivery of vital community services even harder than it has been hitherto. Is this not another example of the incompetence and arrogance of the Secretary of State for the Environment? Will he, even at this late stage, reconsider the way in which the House is to proceed with this legislation, and withdraw the guillotine for next week?

Mr. Biffen: We all have our distinctive rhe situation, and what the right hon. Gentl "curtailing scrutiny" I would describe as pr measured debate on this important Bill. Mu already been taken on the issue, and it will be Monday for the House adequately to consider and the arguments.

As to the rate support grant, the right hon. G anxiety about the prospects for the considera legislation will not be fulfilled.

I shall look into the right hon. Gentleman's the amendments to the Local Government F and see what can be done to meet it.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will my right find time to arrange a debate on industria Given that the former chairman of the B council, who was largely responsible for engi Grunwick strike in 1976, has now turned up campaign leader in the Devonport dockyard, the interests of the economy be served by disco is behind such a move?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises an inte specific point to exemplify his general concern relations would be a good topic for debate if had that amount of time, but I can hardly ad have such time when I am announcing a Perhaps my hon. Friend might seek an A debate on the narrower point.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill Leader of the House had time to reflect on the the South African Government have had discu the Isle of Man to pursue the taking over of so that they can evade international trade sanc the right hon. Gentleman be able to report to on this matter in the next few days, or can statement?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into the matter of and let the hon. Gentleman know the result.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): W hon. Friend give serious consideration to an e in connection with early-day motion No. 390 *House regrets Her Majesty's Government's dec award the £1·41 weekly increase to elderly pol notes that the total cost of the increase would ha than £500,000 per annum; and calls upon He Government to review urgently the decision, e this was the amount agreed by the Police Committee.]*

It refers to police reserved rate widows, whose is 84 years. Since agreement was reached by Negotiating Board on 25 February, 1986, 1,0 pensioners have died. This is an urgent matter receive the compassion of the House.

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for point. Initially, perhaps it would be helpful if I matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Sec

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washin the Leader of the House had an opportuni articles in the newspapers about the seriou London and other cities as a result of the fa water system? It has been reported that up t Londoners are not getting a proper water su tankers are having to take water into hospita

90 water mains burst every day. As this is due purely and simply to the Government's policies not to allow water authorities to invest in infrastructures, to reduce borrowing requirements and, when authorities such as Thames Water make a profit, to turn authority chairmen into overt tax collectors, will the Leader of the House arrange a statement on the crisis early next week?

Mr. Biffen: I am not confident that the responsibilities can so simply and sharply be allocated as the hon. Gentleman suggested. Of course, I shall mention the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): May we again have a debate on the philosophy of the future of the Westminster Parliament in relation to the European Parliament? Is my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House aware that Sir Henry Plumb, whom we were all pleased to see elected President of the European Parliament—we were almost as pleased as he was—said two alarming things upon his election? One was that he was born an Englishman and wished to die a European, but he also said that the European view must prevail over national views if the European Parliament is to make real political progress as the legitimate and sovereign state of Europe. Does he not agree that those views would reduce Westminster to the status of a parish council? Should not this Parliament express the clear view to Sir Henry, before he becomes too entrenched in Europe, that he was born English, that many of us want to remain English and we shall fight to remain English?

Mr. Biffen: I note that my hon. Friend stands in the way of Sir Henry and his ambitions. That is a happy situation.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that, as a result of the repeal of the Truck Acts which came into force on 1 January, many hundreds of thousands of people now have bank accounts who never had them before? While the country is quite rightly concentrating on major inequities of the City, we have not had a debate about the way in which ordinary banks are entitled to charge ordinary people interest that can range up to 25 per cent. without informing them how much is being charged. May we soon have a statement from the Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs or from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, or at least a warning to people to be careful about how they are treated by their local banks?

Mr. Biffen: I am most grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for drawing our attention to the fact that countless thousands of working class people today have savings habits that once were the possession of the bourgeoisie. I shall certainly draw the hon. and learned Gentleman's point to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): In view of the great importance to many hon. Members of the Common Market agricultural settlement shortly before Christmas, will my right hon. Friend say whether next Thursday's debate will involve agriculture and, if so, whether an Agriculture Minister will speak in it?

Mr. Biffen: Obviously, the scope of the debate essentially will be within the judgment of the Chair. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friends to the anxiety that my hon. Friend expressed. I am grateful to him for making the point about Thursday's debate. Of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark) will be able to argue all that he succinctly said and at great and welcome length on that occasion.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the Leader of the House assure us that, during the debate about the Devonport dockyard order, an opportunity will be afforded to discuss the company's refusal to accept responsibility for the operation of Devonport dockyard and the radioactive wastes already stored there? To facilitate a full discussion on that aspect, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that, before the debate, full details are released about the Government's intention to build a rad-waste dissolution treatment plant close to Devonport dockyard and what the Government intend to do with it after that is done?

Mr. Biffen: Clearly, the width of the debate will depend upon the judgment of the Chair. I have a sufficiently robust faith in the hon. Gentleman's skills as a parliamentarian to know that he will make whatever speech he intends to make. I shall draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the information that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House note early-day motion 439 urging the introduction of identity cards with bearers' photographs?

[That this House notes the use of identity cards in various Commonwealth, European and other countries, and the requirement in Northern Ireland that driving licences shall carry the driver's photograph; believes that the universal issue of identity cards in the United Kingdom would assist the prevention and detection of crime, including social security fraud and illegal immigration and that, far from lessening civil liberty, it would protect the law-abiding from troublesome and unnecessary inquiries by police and security officers; and therefore urges the Secretary of State for the Home Department to consider the early introduction of identity cards bearing the holder's photograph.]

Will he speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department so that an early statement can be made and the House given an early opportunity to debate this matter further?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend refers to a highly controversial topic, but I shall most certainly convey his request to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Further to the matter raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), will the Leader of the House accept that there is a great deal of concern about the revelations in today's *Independent* about the secret deal between the Isle of Man Government and the Government of South Africa to set up some kind of sanctions-busting operation? Since the freeport is set up with the authority of Her Majesty's Treasury and since the Home Office has ultimate responsibility for the good government of the islands, when some scandal like this happens there ought, surely, to be some arrangement for the appropriate Minister to make a statement to this House of Parliament so that we can ask him questions.

Mr. Biffen: I cannot in any sense endorse the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric. I have already said that I shall refer

[Mr. Biffen]

to my right hon. Friend the point that has been raised. In doing so, I shall also draw his attention to the point that has just been made.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will recall the debate last Friday on television licences for the elderly. However he views the outcome of that debate, it has created a great deal of resentment among elderly people. In particular, they have mentioned that hotels pay for only one television licence, yet they may have many hundreds of rooms with television sets. There is also a great deal of unrest about the structure for the collection of the licence fee. I think that it is time that we began a major review of this subject.

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. I shall certainly convey those considerations to my hon. Friends.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 473 on the anniversary of the Wapping dispute.

[That this House applauds the fortitude and resolve displayed during the last 12 months by the men and women on the Wapping picket lines; notes that in successive ballots they have rejected offers of redundancy hand-outs; supports the call for Mike Hicks to be released from prison as advanced by the recent Labour Party National Executive Council resolution; condemns the Tory-backed Murdoch's systematic use of money earned by British workers to finance his multi-national business ventures; and believes that the House of Commons should debate these issues of civil liberty, undemocratic control of the media and workers' rights.]

Will the Leader of the House tell us whether there is to be an early opportunity for this dispute to be debated in the House so that the Government can tell us why they have failed to intervene in the dispute, which up to now has cost London ratepayers about £14 million in excess police costs? Indeed, it is no more than a very expensive exercise to get filthy, disgusting Murdoch rags out of Wapping.

Mr. Biffen: I note that that is the hon. Gentleman's jaundiced view of such a great and historic newspaper as *The Times*. However, I am disinclined to accept his view that there is a Government responsibility on anything like the scale that he suggests. No provision has been made for Government time to be devoted to this subject. It will be interesting to see whether the Opposition provide any of their time for such a debate.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Has my right hon. Friend had time to note the publication today of a document by Lincolnshire county council and others on the safe disposal of nuclear waste? It relates to Britain's method of dealing with it and to the methods used by France, Sweden and West Germany. Bearing in mind the widespread concern of many people in this country about the disposal of low-level nuclear waste, not least the concern of my Newark constituents, and bearing also in mind the fact that we have not debated this matter for probably a year, will my right hon. Friend offer a debate on this subject to assuage the anxieties of many hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge at once this topic and the skill and pertinacity w Friend has represented the interests o There is no immediate prospect of a deb but I shall certainly bear his observatio

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lo the failure at Question Time of the Mini Fisheries and Food to clear up the cons about the handout of intervention store and needy people, both in relation to distributed and the manner in which it i and in view of the worry that there n ability of voluntary organisations to dis of food to needy and elderly people all we expect next week an oral statement o the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries a

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall pass t right hon. Friend, but I should observe we will debate developments in the Euro and it may well be that in his speech th can — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Ge typically reserved view about the Government or the success of the Con be immensely pessimistic if he does n arguments will have matured by Thurs

Mr. Andrew McKay (Berkshire, Eas hon. Friend agree that it is a sad yet s when a party feels that it is necessary to learn from the newspapers that the Lib SDP, which are somethimes in alli relaunch themselves next week. Thr channels, will my right hon. Friend fin if not next week certainly the week Liberal-SDP Supply day so that they is necessary for then to relaunch them other hon. Members can make contrib well be of assistance to those parties?

Mr. Biffen: That is a fair, charita request. I am all that lies between the re fulfilled. I will of course draw it to the at Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (M I know that he will be as anxious as a why a low flying aircraft engaged in wholly random attacks can ever clain flying success promised by the right Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins).

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North "hypocrisy" is out of order in this Hou Leader of the House describe a situa Prime Minister has 13 television sets and pays no licence fee at all, while at sends her Ministers, including the Lead vote down a Bill which would hav assistance to many pensioners? Is it not payroll vote was used last Friday Member's Bill? Does the Leader of the what happened on Friday is un appreciated by a large number of peop

Mr. Biffen: If it will add to the su happiness, I shall make the investigat Gentleman asks for. Meanwhile, compatibility perhaps he would like to an appropriate occasion why he was

1969 to join in a Labour payroll vote with members of a Labour Government to defeat the improved pension provisions for disabled people.

Mr. Winnick: Fifty years ago.

Mr. Biffen: There is no point in the hon. Gentleman saying, "Fifty years ago". We know that he is faithful to Socialism and has not changed one jot in those 50 years.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The announcement by my right hon. Friend of a debate on the Royal Navy is welcome. May I draw his attention to last week's request and my request, repeated today, for a debate on the merchant marine, shipping and shipbuilding and all that goes with them, especially in the light of the strike by Austin Pickersgill shipyard workers at Sunderland which began on 5 December, finished after five weeks, and started again yesterday.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a point of both general and specific interest to the House. Clearly the terms of debate for Thursday will be set by the Chair. However, there is a good case for arguing the interdependence of the marine fleet and the Royal Navy and I wish my hon. Friend all success when he develops that argument.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am always reluctant to curtail Back-Bench opportunities during business questions, but may I ask for brief contributions, please?

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend consider the wisdom of holding a major defence debate late on Monday week? Is he not aware that one of the most popular and convivial Members of the House, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), was taken so seriously ill yesterday that he was unable to present his private notice question? Because his illness must be of the most serious nature, would it not be fairer to the right hon. Gentleman to give him sufficient time to be able to recover rather than have him undergo the rigours of such a major debate at such short notice?

Mr. Biffen: We assume that the Lobby would observe its normal conventions.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early statement from the Home Secretary on the Metropolitan police decision to tackle racial attacks in Newham and in the London borough of Ealing? Is he aware of the importance of that, in view of the fact that it is said on high authority that Ealing Labour council is considering refusing to allow the police to deliver literature relating to their work in that operation to council property, including council houses? Is he also aware that Ealing Labour council has so far totally failed to meet the Ealing community relations council since it was elected, although there were regular meetings between those two bodies when Ealing council was Conservative controlled? The Conservative council cared about race relations.

Mr. Biffen: Although we have a debate upon the European Community next week, we do not have a debate upon Ealing. My hon. Friend puts me in some difficu on this matter, but I shall certainly report his anxieti my right hon. and hon. Friends who have a responsi in this matter.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Does my hon. Friend share my concern and that of many peop Britain about the continuing abuse of diplo immunity? Does he think that it is time to have a d to look at the terrible figures that show that in the pas years more than 50 diplomats who have been charged offences have managed to get out of the country wi suffering the consequences of their acts? Does my hon. Friend agree that diplomats should behav gentlemen and that that should apply to the spouse registered diplomat. When they come to Britain they represent their country responsibly and if they brea law they should suffer the consequences in Britain?

Mr. Biffen: I understand my hon. Friend's poin will appreciate that that is a matter of some delicacy relationship with those who work here as diplo However, I shall convey his points to my right hon learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I remind my right hon. Friend that the British Corporation has moved into profit for the first time years? I remind my right hon. Friend that state sub to steel industries have not been allowed since Dec 1985 and in that light would he consider the Opposi proposals to put a 1 per cent. levy on the turnover o to pay for training and to oblige the BSC and nationalised industries to recruit labour they d require after all the agonies it went through to ge industry into a proper state? Will my right hon. comment upon that and the effect it will have on the steel industry, which would be eliminated, and th that the bonuses of steel workers would also disap

Mr. Biffen: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is hear to see the great basic industries now serving the ca liberal economics and not of state Socialism. Clear is a development of great distress to the Labour pa it gets left behind in our economic and political evol I shall take account of what my hon. Friend has s

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I like to refer to the point raised by my hon. Frie Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander). The docum which he referred, which was also compiled by the of Humberside, has been produced today and r urgent consideration by the House. Would it be p to rearrange today's business in the House so that be debated today, bearing in mind the fact th Opposition's defence spokesman cannot be here to is an important document and it should have consideration and today might be a useful opport

Mr. Biffen: Proper and prudent consideration given to the document, but I would mislead m Friend if I said that there was much chance of debated later today.

Lloyd's

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the report of the committee of inquiry into regulatory arrangements at Lloyd's.

I have today laid before the House, as a Command Paper, the report of Sir Patrick Neill and his colleagues. I am sure that the House will wish to join me in expressing warm appreciation of their work.

The committee was set up by my predecessor a year ago to consider whether the regulatory arrangements being established at Lloyd's, under the Lloyd's Act 1982, provide protection for the interests of members of Lloyd's comparable to that proposed for investors under the Financial Services Act 1986. The committee recognises the major contribution Lloyd's makes to the national economy. The report notes that the council of Lloyd's has strengthened the regulation in its market by putting into effect a major programme of reform since the 1982 Act entered into force.

The committee makes 70 recommendations, which should bring the two levels of protection into line. The committee does not believe that the solution to the problems it has identified is external supervision of Lloyd's, or an extention of the role of my Department. It recommends, instead, a change in the balance of representation on the council of Lloyd's by increasing the number of nominated independent members. They and the elected non-working members would then command a majority.

The committee also recommends an enhanced role for the nominated members in Lloyd's, for example, through their chairing of important committees.

The committee's conclusion is that its recommendations will make the protection of Lloyd's members comparable to that provided under the Financial Services Act. The committee has, moreover, taken care to strike a balance between the safeguarding of members' interests and the protection of Lloyd's policyholders.

The Government believe that the report provides a good basis for the further development of measures to protect the interests of Lloyd's members. I shall, of course, be discussing the report with Lloyd's. I shall want to hear its proposals and timetable for action. I expect Lloyd's to take all the necessary steps to bring the protection offered to members up to the standard of the Financial Services Act. I shall therefore be following closely with it its progress in this matter.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The Secretary of State referred selectively to sections of the report. Why does he not tell us that, although the report notes that Lloyd's has made approved changes since 1982 it also reaches the conclusion in paragraph 1.5 that, notwithstanding the changes, progress has not been sufficient and it goes on to detect some shortcomings?

Is it the case that the Government did not draw our attention to that because it would invalidate, to some extent, one of their arguments for excluding Lloyd's from the Financial Services Act 1986? Will the Secretary of State bear in mind the narrow terms of reference given to the committee? The terms of reference were to consider whether the protection for names was comparable to the proposed protection for investors under the Financial Services Act. Surely the terms of reference should have been what measures are necessary to restore confidence in Lloyd's? If that question had not been put properly a much more interesting report might have emerged.

Is the Secretary of State aware of the well-expressed comment in many of the newspapers that the chairman, Sir Patrick Neill, wanted much stronger action in the recommendations but was out-voted by his colleagues on the committee? Is it not the case that the proposed changes in the council merely amount to a re-jigging of the membership and not to any fundamental change in Lloyd's? Is it not surprising that although the report identifies the importance of the independence of the chief executive, it proposes no action to secure the independence of the chief executive? That is an important matter in view of the fact that Mr. Hay Davison, a former chief executive, found it impossible to maintain his integrity in the position he had taken up. Is it not clear that the answer is to bring Lloyd's simply and clearly within the provisions of the Financial Services Act so that the same standards apply throughout all of our financial institutions?

Will the Secretary of State tell us how many references there have been from Lloyd's to his Department about persons in respect of whom prosecutions might be taken? How many proposed prosecutions are under consideration by the Department of Trade and Industry? What action will be taken to bring offenders to book, bearing in mind that some major scandals have occurred in Lloyd's? Does the Secretary of State think that it is scandalous that Mr. Peter Cameron-Webb and Mr. Peter Dixon, who have committed gigantic frauds, have not only escaped prosecution but are apparently conducting insurance broking business in Florida?

Mr. Channon: The Director of Public Prosecutions is looking at several cases and my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made a statement to the House on 20 November, to which I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman, which deals with the point he has in mind. On the matter of insufficient progress, the whole purpose of my statement is to say that we wish to provide for Lloyd's comparable arrangements to those under the Financial Services Act. Simply to bring it within the terms of the Act would be wrong and that was widely recognised during the passage of the Bill through the House. It is true that some hon. Members, including some of my hon. Friends, took a different view. I think that what the new report suggests are comparable arrangements that should be satisfactory to the House.

I have no evidence to believe there is a shred of truth in the suggestion that Sir Patrick Neil was out-voted. It is certainly not reflected in the report. I shall now study the report with great care and I shall study any comments made by the House before coming to final conclusions. I want Lloyd's to take all the necessary steps to bring the protection offered to members up to the standard of the Financial Services Act at the earliest opportunity. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will recognise that it says on many occasions in the report that the council has transformed self-regulation for Lloyd's. Indeed, paragraph 1.4 says:

"We know of no profession or equivalent organisation which has accompished such a major programme of reform in such a short timescale."

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the carping about the terms of reference in seeking to probe the internal workings of the committee by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), is a classic example of sour grapes because the committee did not come to the conclusions to which he wanted it to come? Will he further agree that the conclusions of the committee amply confirm the view that was formed that, although changes were needed at Lloyd's, it would be wholly inappropriate to bring about those changes by amending the Financial Services Bill to include Lloyd's? Will he also agree that the time has come, in the light of the positive but substantial recommendations of the committee, for him to urge Lloyd's strongly to proceed with the further changes that are necessary and appropriate to put matters in order?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend—who was responsible for setting up the committee. I entirely agree with his criticism of those who criticise the terms of reference, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) did a few moments ago. My right hon. and learned Friend is entirely right to say that it would be inappropriate—as the report makes clear—to bring Lloyd's within the terms of the Financial Services Act. We must look to Lloyd's to act with urgency and to come forward with measures, in the light of the report, to provide protection comparable with that under the Financial Services Act. I shall be discussing the matter with Lloyd's, and I hope to arrange a timetable that will be agreeable to all parties in the House.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the Government will insist that Lloyd's takes up two recommendations—one on compensation for the names and the other on the appointment of an ombusdman to settle internal disputes? Equally important, will he tell the House about the political shenanigans that occured in the preparation of the report and the pressure, expressed and implied, that was brought on Sir Patrick Neill to stop him following his natural inclination to bring Lloyd's under a wider statutory purview, for which the Opposition have constantly argued?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Member must take responsibility for his own comments. I have no evidence that what he says has the remotest bearing on the truth. Sir Patrick Neill can answer for himself; he has given a press conference this morning, and no doubt he will consider what the hon. Gentleman has said and answer it in any way that he likes. I do not believe that what the hon. Gentleman says is the truth, but Sir Patrick must speak for himself. Neither I, nor, as far as I know, anyone else, has put any pressure on Sir Patrick Neill to come up with any solution. Anyone who knows him knows that it would have been totally counter-productive to make any effort to do so.

As to the question of compensation and the ombudsman, we shall look carefully at all the recommendations in the report and I shall keep the House informed of our thinking on these matters.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): While we all look forward to reading the 70 recommendations of this report with the greatest care and interest, may I put it to my right hon. Friend—I am sure that he shares this view himself—that it is a matter of concern that certain cases of really serious alleged irregularities — which have been very publicised in great detail—have still, after a very long passage of time, not resulted in even the launching of a prosecution? This does seem to contrast rather mysteriously with the relative speed with which, for instance, the Securities and Exchange Commission was able to act in New York in the case of the Boesky scandal.

Mr. Channon: I have some sympathy with what my hon. Friend says about prosecution. However, that is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions, and, as I said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made some comments to the House in late November about that matter. I shall draw what my hon. Friend has said to his attention.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the Prime Minister's recent remarks about the Tory Government taking tough action against the City are to mean anything at all, the Minister should have come to the Dispatch Box today and said that the cosy club, self-regulated atmosphere at Lloyd's would end. What he is really saying is that Lloyd's can do as it likes. The Government will have a few words on the quiet, but the Minister will not change the arrangements. We shall return to the Cameron-Webb and Dixon days, when they got away with £39 million. The Berlin wall mentality will continue to operate at Lloyd's, where nobody else can interfere, including the fraud squad. Why should that area of the City be a no-go area, when 138,000 claimants on the DHSS are done by those same fraud officers?

Mr. Channon: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he cannot have studied the report with care — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Skinner: I read it before today.

Mr. Channon: I read what the hon. Gentleman said in *The Guardian*, but what he says bears no relation to the truth. This was an independent committee, and the House will have to consider its decisions. The committee agrees that that is an acceptable basis on which to go forward, but I want to make sure that there is a proper timetable and that Lloyd's makes the necessary changes. I believe that is what the House wants to see, and that is what we shall do.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend agree that the keynote of the recommendations — the increase in the independence of the governing body—should be accepted to ensure that all parties involved in Lloyd's, and the public, can have confidence in Lloyd's. Furthermore, the key question is whether one can strike a balance—as the report accurately does—between self-regulation, which has to be maintained for practical reasons, and tough regulatory action for defaulters.

Mr. Channon: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that the change in the composition of the council should take place. I shall discuss that point with Lloyd's at an early date. Lloyd's have issued a statement on its preliminary views, and at first sight that seems encouraging, but I take note of my hon. Friend's views.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): is the Secretary of State aware that that undertaking is most welcome, because the recommendation to increase the number of independent members is of importance in trying

[Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth]

to ensure that there is public confidence in the way in which Lloyd's will be regulated in the future? Will he ensure that that recommendation—while being brought in quickly—does not only refer to Lloyd's? Does it not also imply that there is a case for having the same sort of independent majority on the Securities and Investment Board, which is covering the work of the rest of the City?

Mr. Channon: On the first point, I welcome the hon. Member's remarks and I am glad to have his support. However, I do not think that the situation is on all fours with the SIB, but it is open to me to keep under review the number of lay members that there will be on the SIB. I shall keep that under continuing review. If it proves necessary to make a change, we shall make a change, but I do not think that there is any need for that at present.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. friend agree that many of the 70 recommendations in the report are significant in terms of constitutional change, investigatory powers and monitoring? The question for the Government must be whether they can be accommodated from the inside by simple changes of rules within the council, or whether they should be introduced from outside by some means or another. It has always been the view of many of us that it would be wholly improper for this matter to be part of the Financial Services Act. However, will he ensure that he does not close the door on the possibility of introducing changes by a public or private Bill, as many of us still feel that that would restore and enhance the respectability and confidence of both policyholders and members of Lloyd's?

Mr. Channon: I do not close off any possibility at present, and I shall bear my hon. Friend's views in mind. However, I am anxious to proceed with some speed and if that can be done without legislation, which is bound to cause delay, we shall be able to act much more quickly. I want to see investor protection. I agree with what the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said about comparability with the SIB. We all want comparable investor protection to be achieved at the earliest possible moment and that is what we shall work for.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Is it correct that one of the reasons for appointing the committee with its limited terms of reference was to take minutes and waste years and thus fob off the possibility of regulation under the Financial Services Act? Further, is it correct that the wish of the chairman was for a similar framework of regulation for Lloyd's but that he was overruled by the other two members? Is it also correct to say that in wanting comparable arrangements for Lloyd's the committee has conceded the case for regulation under the Financial Services Act, and should not the Secretary of State's proper course now be to rewrite that Act, put it on a statutory basis, and bring Lloyd's within it?

Mr. Channon: I do not agree with anything that the hon. Gentleman says. There is no evidence of the chairman being in a minority, but he can speak for himself. I have no evidence that what the hon. Gentleman says bears any relation to the truth——

Mr. Skinner: The right hon. Gentleman is in a minority.

Mr. Channon: I am not in a minority.

Mr. Skinner: Yes—even in the Cabinet.

Mr. Channon: No, I am in a strong majority, and strong majority of hon. Members is in favour of the repo

The committee was not set up to waste a lot of time. has reported reasonably quickly and we shall take actio quickly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is another statement follow but I shall call those hon. Members who a standing, but I ask them to put their quesions briefly.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): My right ho Friend has stressed the importance of speed in this and t House will welcome that, particularly in view of the la of action so far in prosecuting the perpetrators of the ma scandals that have bedevilled Lloyd's over the past fe years. Therefore, will my right hon. Friend help the Hou a little more by saying how fast he would like Lloyd's act and whether he would expect some action within s or 12 months, or when?

Mr. Channon: I want to have urgent talks with Lloyd and to be in a position shortly to come back to the Hou with an agreed timetable for action. I hope that that wi happen shortly and I shall keep my hon. Friend in touc

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): If Lloyd's is to be place on an equal footing with self-regulating organisatio under the Financial Services Act, my right hon. Friend t Secretary of State must inevitably have the same powe as the Securities and Investment Board already has und the Act. I understood my right hon. Friend to say tha Neill had recommended no addition to the Secretary State's powers. Can he confirm that he already has t same powers to interfere in the affairs of Lloyd's as the SI has to interfere in the affairs of SROs?

Mr. Channon: What I have are powers under t Companies Acts and under the insurance regulatory Ac to deal with the affairs of Lloyd's. There have been number of investigations into groups at Lloyd's in the pa and I believe that I have the necessary powers in that are I also believe that we can now work together—I hop that I am right in thinking that there will not be substanti disagreement between the various parts of the House so that we can agree a timetable for action on the repo so that we shall see progress shortly.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) Will my right hon. Friend remind Lloyd's that it ha conducted a public discussion about how it can institu self-regulation at least since the Fisher report in 1980, an within the next year will he tell it that either it does the jo itself and does it properly or else Parliament will legislat

Mr. Channon: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I welcome th Government's decision to set up the inquiry, and the mai conclusions of the report, as steps towards th maintenance of public confidence in Lloyd's, which i after all, an important earner of overseas exchange. Woul not an even more important step towards rebuilding tha confidence be the early prosecution, and preferabl conviction, of those wrongdoers whose notorious, and a yet unpunished, activities remain a source of considerabl public concern?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I understand and share my hon Friend's view about that matter. I have already said tha

I shall draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to what has been said in the House. This is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions and I shall draw his attention to that.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): How does my right hon. Friend square the idea of a compensation fund for investors with the traditional unlimited personal liability of names at Lloyd's?

Mr. Channon: That is something to be discussed by Lloyd's. It is a suggestion in the report. I am not accepting every detail of the report today. I am saying that, so far as I can judge, it is an acceptable basis for discussion with Lloyd's so that there can be an urgent review and a timetable drawn up on how to proceed. That will be among the matters which I shall wish to discuss with Lloyd's and I would welcome my hon. Friend's views on the topic.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my right hon. Friend accept that those of us who sat on the Committee that considered on the Lloyd's Bill believe that there is a need to be consistent in the House? We should bear in mind that the House came to the view that the case for self-regulation was powerful. Speaking as a name, I am bound to say that the report points the way forward.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that in broad terms I share his views and I shall certainly bear them in mind.

Maternity and Funeral Payments

4.25 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about a technical defect which has emerged in part III of the 1986 Social Security Act.

The Act introduces, among other things, a social fund to provide better targeted help with exceptional expenses to people on low incomes. Most payments from the fund will start in April 1988, but, as the House knows, we intend help with maternity and funeral costs to begin in April 1987. These payments will replace the universal maternity and death grants, and the existing supplementary benefit single payments for maternity needs and funeral expenses.

The Government's clearly stated intention has always been that the social fund maternity payment should be a flat-rate sum, and that the reasonable specified costs of a funeral would be met from the social fund. We always intended to define not only those low income groups eligible for such payments, but also the amounts payable. Those intentions were recognised in debates here and in another place during the passage of the Social Security Act.

The Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1986 were laid last month to give expression to that policy. It is now clear, following consideration of the regulations by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, that there is a defect in the primary legislation. This is because the Act gives powers to prescribe the "circumstances" in which maternity and funeral payments may be made but does not provide, as had previously been understood, a specific power to prescribe the amount of such payments.

We propose to correct this defect immediately and shall introduce a short amending Bill to the House tomorrow. In the meantime we shall revoke the general regulations and intend, subject to the agreement of Parliament, to make and lay a fresh set under the powers to be provided by the proposed amending Bill. These will enable the new arrangements for help with maternity and funeral costs to be implemented as intended from April this year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be making corresponding provision. Our policy of directing help where it is needed most is clearly right and we intend to carry it through.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the Minister aware that this blunder over the regulations, together with the current debacle over the Local Government Finance Bill, is the second time this week that the Government have demonstrated crass incompetence in the pursuit of highly objectionable legislation? Is he aware that, after his climbdown over cold weather payments, this is his second apology to the House within three days, and, after the shambles of repeated court action over the illegal board and lodging regulations, it only enhances the Government's growing reputation for bungling ineptitude in the handling of their business?

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the botch-up has occurred only because the Government were so impatient to vote down thoroughly reasonable amendments in another place on the rights of independent appeal from social fund decisions, so reckless in forcing through the Bill in the last hours before the summer recess, that in their indecent haste they rushed the drafting?

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it is only because the Government are so anxious to reduce expenditure by £200 million a year on single payments such as funeral and maternity expenses, which are so essential to pensioners and poor families, that Ministers are embarrassed by this legislative gap which would otherwise prevent them from cutting payments to the poor?

How can the Government claim to believe in the family when they are going to such lengths to replace grants by means-tested loans for maternity and funeral expenses? Even more important, what is the morality of abolishing at a stroke the death grant, which is an insurance benefit for which people have paid all their lives? Is the Minister aware that, by insisting on taking powers to cut funeral payments to pensioners and others, he is forcing more and more of them to build up savings for their funerals and thus disqualify themselves from cold weather payments because their savings exceed £500?

Is the Minister aware that, instead of insisting on further legislation to enforce cash-limiting the relief of poverty, the Government ought to be taking action to reduce poverty, which has doubled under their regime until it now involves more than 10 million households?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman has somewhat overplayed what has happened. I fear that he is being characteristically pedantic. We are discussing an error, I concede that, but it is a technical error and is in no sense a policy change. It is regrettable that there is an error, but it is most certainly not unprecedented. It may have happened under many other Administrations and may happen under future Administrations, whoever are in government.

The hon. Gentleman should not be so critical of mistakes because he rarely gets anything right himself. This provision targets help more directly on the people whom we believe most need it and we believe that judgment to be correct. As for means-tested loans, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the change to which we are referring established a regulatory system for maternity and funeral payments that will be of particular help to people on low incomes.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I regret the legislative slippage to which my hon. Friend the Minister has referred. Does he accept that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is wrong in maintaining that the way forward is to maintain small and largely meaningless payments of death grants? Is my hon. Friend aware that most Conservative Members endorse the policy that the Government introduced into legislation last year, under which much more substantial assistance is paid where need exists and that, notwithstanding the delay, he is heading in the right direction and should not be deterred?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he is right. We propose to correct the defects and proceed with the policy that we enunciated some time ago. If the hon. Member for Oldham, West believes that the present system is so inadequate, it is surprising that the last Labour Government did not upgrade the death grant or the maternity grant.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I express to the Minister my sympathy on the onset of a political condition that the doctors call Ridleyism. that it proves not to be terminal. As he is now lo again at the death grant and proposes to us regulations to correct this fault, would it not be sensible to increase substantially the value of the grant as presently constituted but make that reclaimable from the estate of the deceased — MEMBERS: "No."] Yes. The money would therefo targeted on those most in need and give more subst help to them.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman has shown th may have misunderstood the policy. We are conc with targeting funeral assistance most appropriately people in greatest need. I believe that it is possi proceed in the fashion suggested by the hon. Gent under the provisions before us.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (Surrey, South-W Although one regrets this error, would my hon. F keep the matter in perspective? The death grant of £ become almost meaningless when funerals cost s hundred pounds. Neither grant has been upgrade nearly 20 years. It is extremely important to give re help to those in genuine need.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely right whe describes most acutely the policy that we have enun and propose to follow.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): Since low weigh term babies are likely to be handicapped and this c forecast, and since there will be flexibility in the sy will the Minister give increased maternity gran mothers at risk of producing disabled babies?

Mr. Major: The proposition is for a flat rate mat grant, which I announced some days ago, of £80 in re of the groups who qualify. The underlying propo about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned is me number of ways in social security and social se legislation but is not particularly appropriate to the ci of the sort that I believe he has in mind.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Surely we all wa ensure that resources are directed to those most in n the most appropriate quantities. Is that not what th is designed to do? Is not the hon. Member for Old West (Mr. Meacher) making a mountain out of a mo

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is precisely right on counts.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penist Does the Minister not realise that his stateme regrettable in that seeking to put right what is wrong to be the Government's classic disease in their legisla The words used by the Minister — "targeting" "guiding towards those on low pay" — are em words to give an impression of compassion and effici when this is only a major rescheduling of money fro poor to the poorer still and is taking money out o welfare state.

Mr. Major: The hon. Member might like to be mind the substantial increase in directly targeted he those people on relatively low or very low incomes believe that that policy is correct and we shall purs Insofar as we can target the help most adequately in direction, we can deliver a greater measure of help would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does not my right hon. Friend find it remarkable that the one complaint that can be made here is in relation to a purely technical error on the part of a draftsman which now has to be corrected? Instead of addressing himself to that problem, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) harks back to a time when tiny death grants were dished out to people who for the most part, did not need them, instead of looking forward to a time when help is going to be targeted to those who most need it.

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. Ministers must accept responsibility for the error in the Bill. We are content to do that and to correct it without delay.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Are not the Government likely to keep landing in the cart, making errors and over-taxing the law people, civil servants and draftsmen with their proposed revolutionary changes, tearing up the Beveridge report, as they are consistently doing with the death grant and insurance right? Why does not the Minister try to return to the real core of traditional Toryism, that of gradualistic change, instead of bringing in these revolutionary measures?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is exceedingly tempting. I shall confine myself to saying that, after 40 years, there is general agreement, whatever differences exist, that a substantial number of changes are required in the social security system.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. Friend go back to his Department and tell his draftsmen that the House of Commons is getting fed up with these errors, that, if they cannot get it right, they need not expect their CBEs in the Honours List and that we would rather put the work out to contract?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is characteristically forthright, but I must reiterate two points. First, the error arose as a result of an attempt to reflect quickly the will of the other place. Secondly, when a Bill is presented to Parliament, the Minister is responsible for any mistake.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): Although the Minister generously accepts responsibility for the follies and foolishness of his lawyers, does he not think that it is time that the DHSS sacked the lot of them and exposed them to the market economy for failure to deal with the job that they have been given? More to the point, since we are talking about general expenses, is it not time that the Minister relaxed the £500 capital disregard in relation to grants made for fuel allowances? It is unacceptable to the House that that should remain in force unadjusted while we are moving into the new system.

Mr. Major: Although I understand that the hon. Gentleman would not have meant it personally, he is being very unfair to the many lawyers who worked on the Social Security Bill it was a substantial, difficult and technical Bill to carry through. I regret the fact that this error has occurred, but it has. Insofar as the £500 capital limit is concerned, I can add nothing to what I had to say on Tuesday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, during the past half hour, we have seen the two sides of the ugly face of Toryism? The Neill report was treated with disdain by Ministers after a £100 million swindle at Lloyd's in the City. Now another junior Minister has come along to tell us that a mistake has been made, and he does not have the decency to allocate a proper funeral allowance without applying the means test, despite calls from both sides of the House for such an allowance. It is no wonder that Lubbock's body is going to the dogs.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is being characteristically obnoxious. Frankly, he needs a verbal straitjacket.

Mr. Skinner: Even your vocabulary is not very good.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am just waiting for my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to finish.

I am intrigued that the Minister should come to the Dispatch Box and accept ministerial responsibility for this mistake. This is in stark contrast to the attitude of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who came to the Dispatch Box and tried to share the blame among a range of people—in fact, to put the blame on anyone but himself. Will the Minister tell the House who spotted the mistake?

Mr. Major: That is clear from my statement. It arose as a result of the consideration of regulations made under the primary legislation by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Michael Brown
Mr. Peter Pike
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

BILLS PRESENTED

Rate Support Grants

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. John MacGregor and Dr. Rhodes Boyson, presented a Bill to make further provision as to the calculation of entitlement to block grant under Part VI of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Social Security (Cold Climate Allowance)

Mr. Gordon Wilson, supported by Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. Donald Stewart and Mr. D. E. Thomas, presented a Bill to provide for more equitable heating allowances to reflect the increased costs of domestic heating in colder climates; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 April and to be printed. [Bill 51.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made,

That the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1987 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. — *[Mr. Lighthown.]*

Mr. Walter Harrison (Wakefield): No.

Mr. Speaker: Has the right hon. Member the support of 20 hon. Members?

Mr. Harrison: Last night, unsolicited, there were 171 hon. Members in support of the first vote that I called and 10 in support of the second. That is an average of 90·5. I am certain that I shall get 20 supporters, so I say no.

Mr. Speaker: I shall put the Question.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 18.

Division No. 59] **[4.45 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Dorrell, Stephen
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts S)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Do*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brar
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcoln
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Sca*
Shepherd, Colin *(Herefo*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfie*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Wor*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherw*
Stradling Thomas, Sir J
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'h*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acto*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Francis Maude an
Mr. Michael Portillo.

NOES

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bidwell, Sydney
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
George, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Heffer, Eric S.
Lamond, James
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Nellist, David
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Redmond, Martin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merion*
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Walter Harrison a
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Royal Air Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

4.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Archie Hamilton): This is the first Royal Air Force debate that I have had the privilege to open. It is an especial privilege in this the 75th anniversary year of the founding of the RAF's precursor, the Royal Flying Corps. From those early days the RAF has played a crucial role in the defence of the nation. Today the RAF is one of the best equipped and most professional air forces in the world. It can project awesome air power in all its forms, wherever and however it may be ordered to do. The House well knows the importance of air power. The German blitzkrieg campaigns of 1940 and 1941, the Battle of Britain, Pearl Harbour, and, more recently, the Arab-Israeli wars and the Falklands conflict have all demonstrated the essential prerequisite of air superiority if other battles are to be fought and won.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister mentioned the Falklands conflict. On several occasions some of my colleagues and I have asked the Ministry of Defence to tell us about the deployment of naval and air forces, as well as personnel, in the south Atlantic. We are always told that we cannot be informed of that because it is a matter of national security. Does the Minister believe that the deployment of our forces is unknown to Argentina and to the Soviets, or to whoever else wants to find that out? Why is it that the only people who are not told how much deployment there is in the south Atlantic and what we are getting for the huge sums that are being spent there—the only people who are left totally in the dark — are the British Parliament and the British taxpayers, who must foot the Bill? Why can we not be told what we must clearly expect our enemies to have information about? Why can we not be told what the deployment is in the south Atlantic?

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot speculate on how good the Argentine intelligence services are, but it must be right to keep secret exactly what our deployments are, because we are trying to deter any future adventurism in that area. Therefore, the less specific we are about our troops and deployment there, the better.

Land and sea forces are naked without air cover and can rarely complete their tasks without air superiority. That point is not lost on the Soviet Union, whose defence expenditure, huge as it is, has been focussed in this direction, with the introduction in the past decade of the Foxbat, Fencer, Flogger, Fulcrum and Flanker fighters, The Backfire and Blackjack heavy bombers and its own AWACS, the Mainstay airborne early warning aircraft.

During our debate on the Army last week the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), accused my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces of fearing to look forward. The accusation was quite unjustified. We do not pretend that maintaining an effective, credible and balanced defence within reasonable resources is easy, but it is much easier for us than it would ever be for the Labour party, bearing in mind the increasing influence of the hard Left.

I look back gladly on the substantial increase in expenditure in real terms which we have achieved in the last eight years and which has given the RAF its biggest re-equipment programme for 30 years, with the build-up of the Tornado GR1 force nearing completion, the Tornado F3 entering service and the Harrier GR5 to follow shortly.

Those and other systems, which I shall describe, will provide the backbone of our air power as it enters the next decade. Range of operations, mobility and speed of response define the key characteristics in each of the major roles which the RAF undertakes. Modern attack aircraft, such as the Tornado, can carry a wide range of weapons by day or by night and in all weathers, and can even perform two or more different roles in the course of a single mission. Their range of action can be extended by in-flight refuelling and they can be re-targeted in the air. Air transport is vital for reinforcement both within the tactical environment and strategically. For example, Mount Pleasant airport now gives us the ability to reinforce the Falklands by air in a matter of hours.

Now I shall address some aspects of Britain's air power in greater detail. I shall deal first with air defence, which is air power in its own right, and our protection against the air power of any potential aggressor. Air defence of the United Kingdom not only secures the protection of our national territory, but plays a vital role in NATO'S ability to defend western Europe from any attack by Warsaw pact countries. The United Kingdom provides a forward base for maritime operations in the north-east Atlantic and north Norwegian sea, a rear base for operations on and over continental Europe, and a main operating base for maritime operations in the Channel and eastern Atlantic. The United Kingdom would play a crucial role in any conflict as a staging post for reinforcements from North America. The RAF's air defence capability will greatly increase in key areas during the next few years.

One hundred and sixty-two of the air defence variant of the Tornado have now been ordered. In 1985 the operational conversion unit was formed to train pilots on the new F3, and the first squadron will become fully operational later this year. Thereafter, squadrons will form every six months until 1990. The F3's excellent range and loiter capability—which can be extended by air-to-air refuelling—is ideally suited to the role of air defence of the United Kingdom because it allows us to fly long combat air patrols far out of the North and Norwegian seas and the Atlantic to intercept enemy aircraft before they can launch long-range missiles.

I have to acknowledge that some difficulties have been experienced with the development of the F3's sophisticated airintervention radar, Foxhunter, which does not yet meet the requirements of the RAF in full. However, I am glad to say that we are defining a programme of work with the contractor to pursue a resolution of the problems and the achievement of an acceptable standard for the radar.

There is no dispute that airborne early warning is an essential component of air defence. In the jargon beloved of the Ministry of Defence it is a "force multiplier", which allows the best use of the resources at our disposal. It can evaluate threats over a wide area and direct fighters to where they are most needed. As the Warsaw pact develops its capability for operations at low level, including its deployment of cruise missiles, so the ability of the AEW aircraft to look down on and detect potential targets becomes more and more important. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said to the House last month, the need to have absolute confidence in the system adopted

[Mr. Hamilton]

to fulfil this crucial role was central to the Government's difficult decision to select the Boeing E3A rather than the Nimrod system.

The third key improvement is in the area of radar systems and command and control of the air defence battle on the ground. The House will not be surprised to know that the Ministry of Defence has yet another acronym for this, but it is the ugliest of them all: the United Kingdom air defence ground environment—known as UKADGE. It gathers information primarily from a chain of ground radars and from AEW aircraft and enables RAF controllers to direct out interceptors towards enemy aircraft or cruise missiles. Installation of the improved UKADGE is continuing well. Six new transportable radars have now been delivered and preparation of new command and control systems is under way. This represents the most radical improvement to UKADGE since the early 1960s, and will provide the United Kingdom with a sophisticated automated system in which the computing capability of a single new radar control console will exceed the entire capability of the old system.

For some time now the RAF has been a leading exponent of air-to-air refuelling techniques. The Falklands conflict underscored the value of air-to-air refuelling both to extend the range of an aircraft and to increase its loiter time. It is another important force multiplier.

Since 1982 we have introduced a squadron of VC10s and purchased six ex-British Airways TriStars, of which the first three are in service. As a result we were able to disband one of the two remaining squadrons of Victor tankers in June last year. We plan to replace the remaining Victor squadron with a further five VC10s and three converted TriStars in the 1990s. The TriStar is particularly effective because it offers a vastly increased fuel capacity and long range, and can carry fuel, passengers or freight. This new fleet will enable the RAF to support its refuelling requirement well into the next century.

In NATO's central region the fundamental requirement is for mobility, both in the air and on the ground, in order to concentrate firepower quickly and to counter-attack in depth so that the momentum of a Soviet attack can be broken.

This is the key to the new concept of operations for Northern Army Group, of which BAOR is part. It is described in page 33 of last year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates", which the right hon. Member for Llanelli seems to have missed when he accused us last week of having forces

"pinned down in a linear forward defence." — [*Official Report*, 13 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 183.]

The right hon. Gentleman confuses NATO's strategy of forward defence with the tactical conduct of the battle.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Minister will recognise that the role of the helicopter is vital in this context and I wish to press him on two matters relating to that. First, he has said that a decision is pending on future helicopter policy. Can he be more specific about that, bearing in mind how eagerly the decision is awaited in Yeovil by Westland? Secondly, does he recognise that if he gives in to a temptation to drip feed orders for helicopters he will not meet the needs of our armed forces in the central plain of Europe and he could do enormous potential damage to the integrity of the Westland work force and the technologies required to support that?

Mr. Hamilton: I recognise the interest o
the future of helicopters. I shall come to tha
give any of the hard undertakings wh
Gentleman seeks.

The Royal Air Force in Germany ha
providing aircraft for strike-attack, offensiv
reconnaissance roles in the central region.

The Tornado GR1 strike-attack aircra
system. Its terrain-following radar enable
penetrate enemy air defences at low level a
and to deliver weapons accurately at long
the RAF last took part in the United St
strategic air command bombing competi
Tornados won two of the three major trop
we competed and came second in the third
second year in succession that our cr
outstanding results against the best crews
the USAF. We can be proud of the profes
skill demonstrated by the RAF.

The formation of nine squadrons
completed towards the end of last year. This
one squadron declared to NATO every fou
the end of 1983, went according to plan an
highly successful introduction into service o
Already we are looking forward to a pla
improvements package to enable the Torna
to meet the evolving threat into the next c
remain the backbone of our long-range att

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melt
Friend will know that the Tornado pilots ori
at RAF Cottesmore in my constituency and
been considerable concern, on which I h
corresponded with him, about the length of
taking the Government to conclude their su
compensation. Will my hon. Friend tell th
the results of the survey will be announced

Mr. Hamilton: If my hon. Friend will forg
leave that to my hon. Friend the Under-Sec
for the Armed Forces. I am sure that he wi
when he replies this evening.

Offensive air support is provided by the
aircraft. The Harrier GR3 currently in s
replaced by the GR5, beginning next year
GR5 has been developed jointly with the
and although similar in appearance to the G
new aircraft with a greatly superior ca
equipped with highly sophisticated electr
measures, which make it much more likely t
the battlefield. It has a much more adv
avionics, and double the payload or radius
a greater variety of weapons. Finally, the
capable of operating at night and in poor v

RAF (Germany) also operates Chinoo
helicopters, so I cannot pass by without re
Department's study on the future military re
support helicopters which is nearing co
recognise the need to resolve this issue
possible and we hope to be in position to
during the next month or so.

I have no doubt that many hon. Memb
the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdow
answers to questions such as "When will w
"Why have the Government not already d
because we understand the importance of th

that we are addressing it with care. We would much rather take the time to come to the right decision than rush into the wrong one.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister will be aware that Sir John Cuckney has told the Government of the extreme importance to Westland, in order to maintain the integrity of the work force and its ability to meet the future needs of the EH101 productions, of making the decision before March. Will the Minister at least assure the House that the Government have registered that request and intend to provide a decision at last by that date?

Mr. Hamilton: We recognise the urgency of the position for Westland and I hope that a decision will be made by March.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): These decisions normally impact on more than one service at a time. Can my hon. Friend tell the House what the Government's current assessment is of the viability and effectiveness of the helicopter in a tank-busting role? We hear a great deal about investment in tanks. I wonder how much we shall invest in tanks in future, and how much in helicopters.

Mr. Hamilton: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the balance between helicopters and tanks, and this is being considered and reviewed continually. I do not believe that we are seriously entertaining a proposal that the balance should be much changed. It is unlikely that we shall see a great disbandment of tank regiments. We must bear in mind that the Soviet Union has a vast number of tanks in the Warsaw pact.

I now turn to maritime operations, in which air power is essential to the efforts of the Royal Navy and our NATO allies in the Atlantic battles to defend vital sea lines of communications and in the forward battles in the Norwegian sea. Shore-based aircraft with rapid reaction times, a long range air-to-air refuelling and the ability to locate, track and attack both surface ships and submarines all contribute.

The name Nimrod is now firmly linked in the public mind with the AEW project, but we must remember that the original Nimrod is the long-range maritime patrol version, which is one of the world's best anti-submarine aircraft. In 1986 the modification of the RAF's force of four squadrons to mark 2 standard was completed, giving them an effective capability through to the mid-1990s.

I am pleased to report that it is not only tornado crews who win prizes, as a Nimrod from 120 squadron won this year's Fincastle trophy, held in southern Australia. The competition, between maritime patrol aircraft of the RAF and Canadian, Australian and New Zealand air forces, consists of day and night sorties against a target submarine. The Nimrod crew were clear winners and were the only competitors to carry out successful attacks in both missions.

Turning now from the theory of air power to the practice, one of the high points in RAF training this year was Exercise Saif Sareea—Swift Sword.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Before my hon. Friend embarks on that interesting adventure, will he say whether studies have been undertaken by the Ministry to convert the old air frames of Nimrod mark 3—presumably they will now be surplus—into badly needed additional mark 2s for maritime patrol aircraft?

Mr. Hamilton: The existing surplus Nimrods will almost certainly be used as a back-up for the maritime, reconnaissance role, but there are 11 of them, and I do not think they will all be used for that purpose.

Exercise Saif Sareea was an out-of-area joint force field training exercise held in Oman, in conjunction with the Sultan of Oman's armed forces, during the period 16 November to 8 December 1986. It was the first major venture of its kind mounted since the Falklands operation and was designed to demonstrate the United Kingdom's capability for rapid deployment overseas and joint operations with the host nation. The Royal Air Force contributed Tornados, tankers and air transport aircraft. Royal Air Force history was made when a fully loaded VC-10 passenger transport aircraft refuelled in mid-air from a VC-10 tanker en route to Oman, which it reached after a non-stop flight.

The exercise also illustrated the dual transport-tanker capability of the RAF's new TriStar aircraft. Supported by TriStars and VC-10 aircraft in the tanker role, four Tornado GR1 and two Tornado F3 aircraft deployed from the United Kingdom to Masirah in a non-stop flight of over 10 hours and were airborne again on a combat mission within 35 minutes of landing there—a striking testament to Britain's ability to project its airpower. During the exercise, Tornados flew 40 representative sorties in Oman, including a demonstration airfield attack, and Hercules aircraft completed 80 sorties in support of 5 Airborne Brigade, including a formation air drop of 443 paratroops from seven aircraft, including an Omani Hercules.

Visitors to the exercise included my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, the Chief of Defence Staff, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Strike Command and hon. Members from the Select Committee on Defence. This exercise exceeded expectations in all areas, not least in the degree of combined and joint co-operation that had been achieved. The exercise also demonstrated convincingly the speed and efficiency with which, given a secure airfield and host nation support, the United Kingdom is able to put a sizeable force into a remote theatre through airpower. I am sure that those hon. Members who were able to observe parts of this exercise will wish to join me in recognising its success and to congratulate all concerned.

Mr. John Ward (Poole): Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedication, skill and indeed co-operation of the Omani forces which took part in this exercise?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, indeed. I pay great tribute to the Omani forces. I know that the exercise could not have been a success without their co-operation.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I was interested to hear my hon. Friend's comments, and the success of that operation is beyond doubt. Is the Ministry aware of the need for futher exercises in that part of the world, where there is so much tension, and where British troops would always be welcome?

Mr. Hamilton: We are aware that many of our friends in that region were very impressed by this exercise, and I am sure that they would like other exercises to take place there in the future.

To be effective, the Royal Air Force has to fly and fight on the leading edge of technology. Looking forward then,

[Mr. Hamilton]

the next major aircraft requirement is for a replacement for Phantoms and some Jaguars, which we intend to fill with the European fighter aircraft, or EFA. Warsaw pact aircraft coming into service from now and through the 1990s are expected to be much more manoeuvrable than existing types. EFA is intended to be a highly agile combat aircraft, optimised for gaining local air superiority against enemy fighters, but also possessing a good air-to-ground attack capability, where its agility will help it to avoid enemy defences.

Project definition for EFA was completed in September and we and our partners signed the general memorandum of understanding. We are all currently evaluating the outcome of the definition phase and have agreed a short period of further work to refine the design and prepare the ground for full development that is planned to be launched later this year, subject to national approval procedures.

Weapons as well as aircraft must keep pace with new threats. The next generation of air-to-air missile must also be capable of locking on to and destroying highly manoeuvrable targets at greater ranges than today. The United Kingdom, Germany and France have signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States whereby the European signatories, together with Norway, are to develop an advanced short range air-to-air missile ASRAAM, while the United States is developing an advanced medium range air-to-air missile AMRAAM.

Both missiles will be "fire and forget", and aircraft carrying them will be able to engage several targets at the same time. The military advantages are obvious. The ASRAAM-AMRAAM "family of weapons" agreement is another example of the way in which members of the Alliance are striving to obtain maximum value from their defence resources by avoiding the duplication of expensive development work.

In the year since the House last debated the Royal Air Force, the importance and flexibility of air power has continued to be demonstrated in practical operations. Only last week the RAF provided desperately needed helicopter flights to move the sick and the injured through the worst weather this country has seen in recent years.

The United Kingdom is not the only place where such help has been rendered. The House will, of course, recall the magnificent efforts of the RAF in Ethiopia, where it won the admiration of the world. Less publicly but no less important, the RAF ferried equipment, medical supplies and medical teams in El Salvador following the disastrous earthquake there. In June, Puma helicopters from Belize, together with a Hercules, carrying relief supplies arrived in Jamaica to help in the mopping-up operation after the serious flooding which followed two weeks of rain.

Nearer home again, the RAF search and rescue force continued to provide invaluable safety cover. I will mention just two examples showing the ability to project this capability at considerable distance from base. In November, RAF Sea Kings rescued the 28-man crew of the Kowloon Bridge, which eventually sank off the coast of south-west Ireland, hundreds of miles from their base in Wales. Despite the fact that the call for help was made at midnight, and in a force 11 gale, the rescue was made within two hours. On Christmas day a Nimrod found the survivors of the Icelandic freighter Sudurland in a water-logged lifeboat and dropped them a survival kit which included a new lifeboat and almost certainly saved their lives. Again this was done hundreds of
home base with a very short response time
all hon. and right hon. Members will join
to the bravery and skill of all those in the
services.

I have spoken so far about the varyin
RAF is required to perform and about
available, or under development, for meet
None of this would be possible, of c
dedicated and professional personnel.

As for reserve forces, both the Royal
Force and the Royal Air Force Volunte
expanding at present. The role of the Roy
Force was widened by the formation, in
defence squadron, and the strength of the
Volunteer Reserve, which last year celeb
jubilee, has recently been increased throu
of a second intelligence flight.

Three trials are under way on p
expansion, covering the viability of a suppo
to the Territorial Army's home service
feasibility and cost-effectiveness of using
Force Volunteer Reserve reservists in two
one trial, reservists will fly in N
reconnaisance and VC10 aircraft; in the
instructors will train students in universit
If the latter scheme is a success, regular
instructors could be released to the front

There is nothing new in the quality of
in the RAF. I sit in the room which prev
to the old Secretaries of State for Air, an
wall a framed letter from the late King Ge
in 1943 on the 25th anniversary of the R
The RAF was then at war, and the Kin
successes primarily to

"the spirit which inspires each and every mem
—the spirit which attains the stars, howev
may be".

There are many examples today of this spi
like to look back on one as a tribute to
the RAF.

In Belize in August, an RAF helicopte
deep into the jungle to evacuate a soldie
back. When the helicopter arrived at the sc
Despite low fuel and treacherous surrou
manoeuvred his aircraft over the casualty
attempts to winch him safely on board, a
was done, darkness had fallen and the p
return to base. Throughout the oper
demonstrated anticipation, courage and
highest order, and the injured soldier
owes his life to him. The pilot has be
Queen's Commendation for Valuable Se

Another operation demonstrated th
skills in a very different way last ye
Members will have seen for themselves t
skills, daring and sheer bravura of the
five weeks last summer they toured the mi
It was the biggest project ever mounted
resulted in a 19,000-mile round trip, wit
countries. The tour culminated at
Indonesian air show in hot and humid c
a lesser aircraft might have encounter
serviceability so far away from home. Th
the case with the Hawk.

The tour was an unqualified success and strengthened the RAF's relations abroad through the superb flying displays, which we have come to expect from the Red Arrows, and the professionalism of the team members and their support crew. The tour also enhanced the prestige of our aerospace industry and improved the prospects of further sales of the Hawk.

There can be no doubt that, like the Red Arrows, Britain's aerospace industry is one of our great success stories. The Rapier missile system operated by both the RAF and the Army has won over £2 billion-worth of overseas orders. The RAF's Hawk trainer is already in service with, or ordered by, many air forces across the world. As recently as last week hon. Members will have seen press reports that the Swiss Defence Ministry has selected the Hawk for its advanced jet trainer requirement, after a direct competition with the Franco-German Alpha jet.

The Swiss were impressed by the technical and operational advantages of the Hawk and the competitive terms which British industry were able to offer. This is a classic example of how to succeed abroad—the right equipment, coupled with the right marketing, and the strong support of the Government. Hawk also cracked the hardest market of all when it was selected by the United States Navy. Given the strength of the indigenous defence industry in the United States, this is a highly significant achievement.

Sir Anthony Buck (Colchester, North): Can my hon. Friend tell us about the prospects for sales of Hawk to Venezuela? They were lined up, but there was a period of desuetude during the Falklands crisis. I understand that there is a substantial chance of sales being revamped. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces can give a reply in his winding-up speech.

Mr. Hamilton: I shall refer that question to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces.

The outstanding success of recent years has undoubtedly been the sale of Tornado. The House will recall that Tornado forms part of our biggest-ever export deal. On current estimates, the sale to Saudi Arabia is worth at least £5 billion. The Ministry of Defence, the RAF and a number of members of the Government, not least my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister herself, have worked hard to secure that deal. It will bring 9,000 extra jobs directly to workers at British Aerospace at Warton, Brough, Kengston and Dunsfold, and indirectly to sub-contractors over the country, and, of course, there will be substantial benefits to the balance of payments.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, even if one excludes that magnificent deal involving the sale of aircraft to Saudi Arabia, defence sales in the aerospace industry last year were as high as they have ever been?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes. Sales in the aerospace industry are running high, as are sales of other defence equipment. Such sales are an important part of British industry and our export performance.

I would have hoped that all hon. Members would welcome the Saudi deal as good news for Britain, but it seems that some in the Labour party are not enthusiastic. The document, "Statements by the National Executive Committee" produced for Labour's last party conference, seemed to take a jaundiced view of the sale. It said:

> "Even the massive £5,000 million deal to export military aircraft to Saudi Arabia, apparently agreed earlier this year, now appears to be in jeopardy."

I hope that the Opposition will now give unqualified support to the Saudi deal and welcome the fact that it is not in jeopardy.

As for future sales of Tornado, the exceptional performance of the aircraft has attracted the interest of a number of other countries, which can expect their inquiries to be met by enthusiasm and co-operation from a Conservative Government.

Regrettably, I have to tell the House that such sales might fall foul of a Socialist Government. The 1986 statement by the National Executive Committee makes it clear that the Labour party expects

> "inevitably a major reduction in Britain's current arms sales".

Labour also expects to diversify the jobs of those in the industries involved into

> "products vitally needed in Third world countries".

How somebody involved in the manufacture of guided missiles can start to make ploughshares I do not know, but that is the proposal.

In addition, there is a proposal to abolish the Defence Export Services Organisation, which has done much to promote Britain's defence industry abroad and help our defence manufacturers to clinch orders in the face of ruthless foreign competition. Such a policy would certainly increase the prices which our own armed forces would have to pay for equipment, by shortening production runs and discouraging private venture development. More important than that, I hope that the Labour party will not shirk its responsibilities and will make it clear to the electorate that its proposals for defence export sales will undermine the job security of many of the 120,000 British workers who depend on the export of defence equipment for their livelihood.

The House will need no reminding of that extraordinary moment in our history when our very survival depended on the men and machines of the RAF in the battle of Britain. I am confident that if we called upon them today, the men of the RAF would display the same courage and dedication as their predecessors. However, 1940 was also characterised by an overwhelming political will—a will to survive and a will to win. By its unilateralist defence policies and its inevitable commitment to a neutralist Britain—in every way—the Labour party of today demonstrates that it does not have the will to fight to defend Britain whereas, by contrast, this Government have demonstrated that they have. Not only that, but—as I hope I have shown today—they have given, and will continue to give, the RAF the backing it needs to do its job today and tomorrow. The Opposition have chosen to ignore what the Government have actually achieved through the years of real growth of resources since 1979. That expenditure has not vanished; the benefits which it has brought are there to be seen today in improved equipment and improved morale in all the services.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) and I fought a long battle in the House to get the EFA off the ground by 1991. We both said that although we had the Spitfire and the Hurricane, we did not have enough of them when they were needed.

[Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones]

That was the problem at that time. If the EFA programme is allowed to slip any more, our good pilots will not have the aircraft at the appropriate time, which is 1995. Will the Minister address himself to that? Secondly, will he kindly deal with an omission? We applaud the airframe, but he has left out the RB199, which will play a significant role in future.

Mr. Hamilton: I fully accept the value of the RB199 and also the need for the RAF to have the EFA. I paid great tribute to that earlier.

The Labour party offers instead a declared intention to abandon our strategic guarantee and to rip out of NATO the theatre nuclear weapons which are essential if we are to have available the full range of weaponry to deter potential aggressors. Labour has made it clear that it wishes to cut our defence expenditure as a proportion of GDP by about a third. It is incredible that the Labour party does not plan on the basis of what Britain and NATO need to meet the threat. Instead, Labour plucks an arbitrary figure out of the air—the average of our major European allies spending as a proportion of national income. We know what that will mean — real defence cuts year after year.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): As the Minister has made the point about the nuclear deterrent in the British area, will he tell the House which nuclear weapons are in the possession and control of British first call? Which can be used simply under the direction of British first call or by the Royal Air Force on the central front? Can he tell us whether, in fact, we have control of those weapons?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman knows well that we do not release that sort of information.

Even the most impressive capability in the world has little value without the will to use it. The Labour party does not have that will; nor does it have any likelihood of delivering the resources that our armed forces need; nor does it even show any understanding of what defence in the nuclear age really demands.

The electorate knows that the Labour party of today cannot be trusted with the defence of the realm. The Government have demonstrated by their actions that when it comes to resources, political will and maintaining the morale of our armed forces, there is no contest.

5.32 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): After that withering attack upon the Labour party's defence policies, I almost get the whiff of electoral grapeshot in the air, but coming from the Under-Secretary, it was more like a grapefruit.

I should like to join the Minister in paying tribute to the work of the Royal Air Force and in particular in recent weeks to the work of the helicopter crews. Those of us who represent coastal constituencies have become used to, and almost take for granted, the fact that, whenever there is an accident or incident at sea, the RAF will be on the scene to rescue holidaymakers or ships' crews from danger. Over the past few weeks we have seen examples of the courage and skill of helicopter crews flying in hazardous, arctic conditions. We should recognise and pay tribute to them, and I join the hon. Gentleman in doing so.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) Gentleman will remember the re mountainous areas who every wint appalling conditions that were com of the United Kingdom recently. Ev to get help from the rescue squadron us.

Mr. McNamara: I agree with the I said, sometimes we almost take th Under-Secretary drew attention to heroism. We echo his support and involved.

If we are to pay tribute to the RA year, and if we accept its training believe that any Government, whethe a Labour Government, have to ke bargain. They have to make sure t necessary training and equipment s ability to do an increasingly difficul

I am afraid that the Government their side of the bargain. That is ref of people who have left the service sin regret that the Minister did not pay important problem of pilot training the RAF — something that has l Service chiefs as the RAF's black hol to be getting worse. The latest fig number of officers and men volunta services early rose by one fifth, to 6,30 December 1985 compared with the c in 1984.

Service men are not happy. The disapproval in the only way they ca without trade unions; they are votin leaving the services. We cannot a expensive trained manpower to go million to train a fast jet pilot and navigator. Aircrew are almost literal in platinum. Yet we are losing them train them and faster than they can

In 1985, up to 5 December, 147 pi before completing their engagemen period 89 pilots indicated a wish to 171 pilots graduated from the trainin pilots left the RAF, 114 witho engagement. Another 213 have said leave, of whom 184 have not y engagement.

Mr. Bill Walker: Perhaps the ho care to examine carefully how thos position within the civil aircraft oper ever been thus. In all the years that has had a problem, it has always occ airlines have themselves been short o poach from the Royal Air Force, successfully. The real answer is to re in a volunteer or auxiliary capacity s not lose them.

Mr. McNamara: I take on bo Gentleman has said; I was just comi

Many of the pilots who are leavin Arabia or joining airline companies. to see how many will take early retir the generous offer just made by Brit

with the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that we must have some way of keeping these people in an auxiliary or reserve air force. I am sure that could be done. It happens frequently. For example, in the United States most of the airline pilots are members of the national guard. We could have a similar system. We know that at the moment British Airways alone wants 100 qualified pilots.

If the RAF wants to keep its pilots and navigators, the Ministry of Defence will have to do something to make it more attractive for them to stay. The local overseas allowance for forces stationed in Germany will have to be re-examined. The Ministry might consider offering its aircrew a retention bonus, which is what the Australians are doing to solve their shortage of pilots. It might do something about the RAF married quarters, 70 per cent. of which are in a lamentable state.

We know that the Ministry has at last started to look at the problem. Air Vice Marshal Bobby Robson has been given this task. I hope that he is successful, but I understand that his last duties were as a public relations man. Public relations are not what is needed. What is needed is a positive reassessment of the role of the pilots, their value and the need to retain them within the service. Not enough urgency is being attached to this problem, which we have been raising over the years in question, of the rundown of experienced personnel and flyers in the RAF.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): As it is the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party to spend money not on nuclear weapons but on conventional forces, and as I understand that 200 extra Tornado aircraft are one of its options, where will it get the money for the pilots, or even the pilots to fly the aircraft? What sum of money is it setting aside to cover that extra cost?

Mr. McNamara: I cannot answer that question in the precise financial terms in which I would like to answer it, because the Government do not produce line-by-line budgets for the House to examine where expenditure has gone. The hon. Gentleman's question cannot validly be asked of me until Ministers are prepared to give us the detailed breakdown of the defence budget that will enable us to do so. All they will give us are rounded sums by which we can calculate what one could do by savings from Trident on the basis of the figures given by the Department for the training, running, purchase, capital and spares costs over 20 years. If the Minister would give us the complete defence budget so that we could see exactly what is going on, I would be in a position, and would be delighted, to give the hon. Gentleman precise details of every item of expenditure. He knows that he has bowled a no-ball—and if he had sent it down to the Minister, it would have yorked his middle stump, because the Minister could not have given him the information either.

Mr. Carter-Jones: The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) would love to have intervened at this point because he has always advocated the supply of auxiliary Air Force members, and he has fought his corner well, while the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) has not taken this point. In 1939, the Air Force was kept going not just by the regulars but by substantial numbers of people who had a little "A" on the side of their arms, meaning that they were auxiliaries and a substantial number who had "VR", who were from the volunteer reserve. My hon. Friend bear in mind that the Government, despite the pl several Conservative Members, have never pursue point.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Frie takes me back five paragraphs to when I drew att to the national guard in the United States as a which people who go into the civil airlines c maintained in military personnel. One of the inte points about some of the recent NATO exercises hav that the United States army and air force hav squadrons staffed by national guard officers. We take that on board.

Our pilots are now training in a basic trainer a that is often 10 years older than the student pilots. defences are dependent on aircraft that could hav placed in Hendon museum long ago.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way

Mr. McNamara: Yes, I shall give way. However, now given way at least five times and I should perh on with my speech. If the hon. Gentleman wis interrupt me, that will only delay matters and I alw to ensure that hon. Members who wish to speak ha opportunity to do so.

Mr. Marlow: I am extremely grateful, for the r that the hon. Gentleman has given, that he has h courtesy of giving way. The hon. Gentleman is about problems of morale, and he is talking abo problems of losing personnel. The hon. Gentleman hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), was indisposed yesterday. Can I ask the hon. Gent if the Secretary of State for Defence had been indi yesterday when he had been expected to be at the Di Box, is it not the case that the hon. Gentleman woul rightly and quite persistently ask, in view of the na his awesome responsibilities, what that indispositio in case it should interfere with his carrying out his I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is in a posit tell us what is the matter with his right hon. Frie when he will be better.

Mr. McNamara: I regret that my usual attempt courteous to hon. Gentlemen resulted in that interru

I was speaking about the rather old machines tha of our Air Force personnel are required to fl problem will get worse. In March last year, Gri Grant and Co., one of London's leading stockb forecast that, up to 1989, the RAF budget is to be sq by 5 to 6 per cent. each year. A consensus has gro among economists and defence experts on both sides political spectrum that further cuts will be made, a expenditure survey published last week or the week shows that for roughly two years, about £1 billi come off the defence budget. That will put a squeeze on what we can achieve.

As the Minister spoke about the number of airc shall ask him for some information about some of and perhaps we can have some answers from the Secretary later. I refer first to the continuing saga Tucano. The Minister has told us that the RA officially just received its first production of the Tucano aircraft after four months of slippage and e modification. We know, however, that it has not g a flying school to start to train our pilots. Instead,

[Mr. McNamara]

gone to the Empire test pilot school at Boscombe Down for evaluation and certification trials. In other words, it has not yet been given the release for service. If Boscombe Down is not happy with it, further changes will have to be made, which will mean more money being spent and further delays.

The Provost jet is over 30 years old and is one of the most expensive aircraft to fly. However, our trainee pilots are having to use this jet, which entered the RAF service in 1956 and in many cases is a decade older than its student pilots. Furthermore, it continually has to be patched up and maintained, which is expensive. We also know that the training manual for the Tucano has not yet been written and cannot be because the Boscombe Down trials have not yet been completed.

We know about the pilots being trained in the Royal Saudi air force. It is receiving its PC9s at the rate of two a month. Most of them are put together in Brough, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Beverley (Sir P. Wall), where a good job is being done. We know that the PC9s do not need changes, modifications or further trials by test pilots. If the Ministry of Defence had opted for the PC9s, it would have had two aircraft in service by the end of 1986 and 12 in service by mid-1987. The Saudis will have 14 in service by mid-year and 28 in service by the end of the year.

How many Tucano aircraft will be in RAF service by the middle of this year and by the end of this year? I do not mean undergoing trials but actually in the service of the RAF, training our pilots. I suspect that the answer will be less than half a dozen, if that, because our aircraft are continuing to experience problems.

It was interesting to hear what the Minister had to say about Hawk and the fact that it had gone to the Swiss. The way in which the Ministry of Defence tried to sabotage the PC9 to claim credit for the Swiss taking the Hawk takes a lot of beating. Credit for that goes to British Aerospace and must be recognised as such. The ability of British Aerospace to work with Swiss companies has enabled it to be successful. It is a sad reflection that the Saudis, with their important budget and their important order with us, took the PC9, the one that the Government were not prepared to take for the RAF.

I welcome also the fact that, eventually and finally, the Hawks have been fitted with side pylons that will enable them to carry their Sidewinder missiles for emergency point defence in the event of war. The fact that this has been demonstrated will show many countries the effectiveness of the Hawk as a defence aircraft. We should welcome that fact.

Over the past years, there has been much controversy in the House about AWACS and Nimrod. I do not wish to reopen that controversy. I am concerned about the situation that still exists. The Shackleton still has a 1941-designed radar—updated, refitted and so on, but basically 1941 technology. Very brave, dedicated men fly Shackletons. They are old aircraft. As one expert recently told me, for all the good that Shackleton radar will be against modern Soviet aircraft such as the long-range fighter, the Fencer, the Backfire nuclear bomber or the latest Blackjack, the crew of the Shackleton might just as well stand in the astrodome with a pair of binoculars.

Our interceptors, including the new Tornado F3, will be of little use against a low-flying Soviet aircraft unless they can be guided to their targets by adequate airborne early warning which the RAF would have had, perhaps much more quickly and much more satisfactorily, had it gone for Nimrod. The decision has been made to go for AWACS. We know that it cannot be replaced until 1991 at the earliest. The system that replaces will not be capable of meeting all the specifications set out in ASR400. Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig has made it clear that such aircraft will not be enough to meet the patrol specification of four aircraft on station and that even if another two are ordered, there still may not be enough to provide adequate coverage of Britain's north-east flank. This means that perhaps 2,000 jobs have been sacrificed and nearly £1 billion has been wasted, and still we will not have the full adequate early warning capability that we need.

What will happen to the Nimrod frames? The Under-Secretary of State said that some may be used for maritime reconnaissance—we welcome that—and some might be used for electronic intelligence. There are many frames. Presumably, over the years, some could be cannibalised, but it would be a terrible waste of what has proved to be an effective reconnaissance aircraft. Does the RAF have more precise plans than perhaps the hon. Gentleman was prepared to state earlier?

The Tornado F3 is important. It will be the mainstay of our air defences in the 1990s. However, I understand that the aircraft is known to RAF crews as a Blue C ircle fighter because it must fly with a concrete weight in the nose while it awaits the Foxhunter fire control radar. Despite the Minister's reassurances last year and the year before, he has said, "We are still redefining the programme." Have the Government set a time scale—a limit? Can they give us a firm date when this important piece of radar will be installed in the aircraft? Basically, until they have that radar, they will be at least 50 per cent. below their capability, if not more. Although it is right to praise the aircraft, as the Minister did, if they do not have the Foxhunter fire control radar, defence capability will be limited indeed.

The Minister said that the Opposition was jaundiced about the Saudi contract. I was not jaundiced, I was delighted, as the Ministry was, but for different reasons. The Ministry was delighted because it meant that it did not have to pay for them for the RAF, and that it could postpone the payment. I was delighted because it showed the prowess of the design and expertise of the countries and the men involved. If the Ministry had wished to show its belief in the worth of the RAF, it would have opened another line to make sure that the RAF got its aircraft at the same time as the Saudis.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South) *rose*——

Mr. McNamara: With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I promise that, if Mr. Deputy Speaker allows me to catch his eye when the debate is wound up and the hon. Gentleman still wants to make his point, I shall give way. *[Interruption.]* I have not even started.

The Minister said that we shall have the Harrier GR5 at the beginning of next year. I presume that that is the first batch of the 62 aircraft that will come into operation then. What will happen — the hon. Gentleman did not mention this—to the second batch? We recall the debate on the Defence Estimates. The Secretary of State gave signs that, whilst some matters were being ordered for long lead items, there was some concern. Will we go ahead with

the second batch of GR5, and when? If we are to do so, what is to become of the present group of GR3s in Germany?

I refer to the European fighter aircraft to be certain that it is safe and will not be cut because of Trident. EFA is essential to our ability to provide adequate air cover for our forces on the central front, and our ability to produce a combat aircraft well into the future depends upon EFA going ahead. By the time EFA is meant to enter RAF services in 1995, Soviet Fulcrum and Flanker aircraft will be well into their mid-life update. At the moment, they are more advanced than any British aircraft of a comparable role. We must be certain not only that we are to get EFA but that there will be no slippage in the time scale for getting it into operation with our Air Force. Therefore, we welcome the fact that the Nato European Fighter Management Agency, NEFMA—not quite as ugly an acronym as UKADGE—has been set up. We welcome the fact that the agency has put out for tender the two most crucial items, the interim engine and the radar. But the pressure must be maintained. We cannot afford slippages with an aircraft as important as this.

Last week, we heard that after only three months, the experimental aircraft programme has been grounded due to lack of funds. EAP is the technology test bed for EFA, or for the British components within EFA. Unless funds are made available by the Ministry of Defence, British chances of winning a share of contracts in EFA could be jeopardised, particularly Rolls-Royce for the RB199 interim engine. Therefore, I urge the Minister to look carefully at financing EAP and to see whether it can be used more continuously.

The tragic loss of the space shuttle Challenger has resulted in our Skynet satellite remaining earthbound. If the HOTOL system goes ahead, Britain will never again be plagued with such a problem. HOTOL is one of the most exciting projects in United Kingdom aviation. It seems to be years ahead of any alternative system and will be much safer. It combines the technology of British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce and, as far as one can find — this information is classified — the revolutionary concepts involved. It is something of which we must be proud and something that we must also keep inside the country. Therefore, we hope that the Government will continue to support it, as they have done until recently.

The space shuttle disaster was due to a leak in the external fuel tank of one of the external booster rockets. Engineers have explained to me that HOTOL would have internal engines and tanks. To a degree, therefore, they would be safer. I understand that that cannot be said of the French and German alternatives. If HOTOL is realised, it will put Europe years ahead of the Americans, whereas Hermes and Saenger will be the poor man's version of the shuttle and will become obsolete. Therefore it is imperative that we should get together with our European colleagues, if the price proves too much for us to sustain by ourselves, to demonstrate the advantages of our system and obtain European collaboration on it. All sides of the House agree about the need to build up a strong European technology pillar for both defence and civil purposes. If this system could be used, we should try to develop it.

Is there more precise information about the Skynet I, II and III satellites? When are they likely to go into orbit? I have seen the film that caused controversy earlier this afternoon. I saw it long before there was any mention of an injunction. As the injunction has been granted, I do not intend to pursue the matter further.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Why then does the hon. Gentleman mention it?

Mr. McNamara: I mention it because some people know that I have seen the film. Therefore, I thought it essential to explain the circumstances in which I had seen it—long before there was any mention of an injunction.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): The hon. Gentleman is showing off.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman must realise that I do not show off. He knows how naturally modest I am. He may say that I have a great deal to be modest about, and I agree with him, but perhaps I do not have quite so much to be modest about as he.

Helicopters featured largely in our debate last week. The Opposition specifically asked for an undertaking from the Government about the future of the supply helicopter. Today the Minister said that there will be a decision by March.

Mr. Hamilton: I hope that there will be a decision by then.

Mr. McNamara: I hope so, too. There is probably more chance of a decision by March than there is of a decision by next December. In March we shall be approaching the witching season. There are many marginal seats in the south-west. Nothing concentrates the mind of any Secretary of State more than marginal seats, when some of his hon. Friends might be at risk. Because of the pressure that has been exerted over the future of the helicopter industry and the Government's role in it, the Government will want to make a specific and early decision.

Since the capital reconstruction of Westland, a £95 million loss have been converted into a £26 million profit. However, two thirds of that profit came from the non-helicopter side of the company, whereas two thirds of the company's expenses related to helicopters. That poses problems for the management. During the past 25 years the helicopter industry has been mainly built up and sustained by the Ministry of Defence, and we look to it to find a way to fill the gap between mid-1988 and 1991 so that the company can sustain and maintain its expertise and technology instead of it being dissipated and drained away, as might happen if there were to be three years of uncertainty. I hope that the Minister will be able to announce that the EH101 utility version will go ahead. It would meet some of BAOR's present requirements. However, I hope that it will be forthcoming not on a drip-feed basis but on a basis that will sustain the company and lead to exports.

One of the problems over helicopters is that for the Royal Air Force they are an afterthought. According to the RAF, helicopters provide a support role for the Army. Last year, the Royal Australian air force decided to hand over its support role to the Australian army. Only the British Army and the Greeks now maintain helicopters in a supply support role for the land forces. It would make sense to consider transferring the RAF's supply support role for the land forces to the Army Air Corps. That would lead to a proper balance in the Army Air Corps.

[Mr. McNamara]

Then the fast fighter pilots, the air commodores and those who make the decisions in the RAF would not treat helicopters as a Cinderella service. I am sure that they try not to do so—that they try to be objective—but when it comes to the allocation of resources within the RAF, I am sure that they are somewhat loth to put the same amount of money into helicopters as they put into other services. Therefore, I urge the Minister to consider that point. It would not be a great loss to the RAF if it lost its helicopter service, but it would provide an enormous boost for the Army Air Corps and the Army generally. It would also make much more sense.

Having consigned the RAF's helicopter service to the Army, the RAF might think that I am being a little ungracious. I merely remind the RAF of the compliments that have been paid to it by all hon. Members for the service that it has provided this winter and in previous years. We wish the RAF well. Whether the service is wearing khaki or RAF blue, we know that we shall be well served. Hon. Members in all parts of the House are proud of the RAF. Whatever the outcome of the general election and the strange meanderings of the Minister, who spent more time on the Labour party's defence policy than upon his Government's defence policy, we must have a Royal Air Force.

The country that puts the Alliance at risk is the country that is unable to carry out the basic conventional role of the Alliance. We have already heard that the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposes to cut the defence budget. Secretaries of State for Defence, whether it be the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), or the present Secretary of State, are afraid to come before the House and deal with our defence strategy in terms of the financial constraints that will be imposed upon them. It does not matter by how much they may have increased the amount of money that is spent upon defence, important though that may be in terms of the Services. Unless we are able to maintain men in the Services and the conventional role of the Services, we are as nothing. The Minister is afraid even to say whether or not the RAF controls the actual use of nuclear weapons. He knows that it does not.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Will the hon. Gentleman please explain to the House how even the finest conventional forces can face up to an enemy that has nuclear weapons when we do not?

Mr. McNamara: The enemy would not use nuclear weapons against us because he knows that that would kill his own forces. Chernobyl showed us that. Not even the Russians can control the elements, or prevent a backflow of nuclear waste over their own territories.

6.9 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): My hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) rightly paid tribute to the personnel of the Royal Air Force. It is worth observing that of our three Services the Royal Air Force has the fewest front line fighting men and the largest number of Service men and Service women in support. Out of approximately 93,000 service men and women in the Air Force, by the very nature of things only a handful can be flying crew.

I am privileged to have in my constituency the N radio school of Royal Air Force, Locking. I know th speak on behalf of many of my constituents when I how proud we are to know many of the serving person who enjoy a close relationship with the town. We welc the great honour paid to RAF Locking in the sum when Her Majesty the Queen paid a whole day visi inspect the forces there.

Inevitably, I should like to speak about the tho subject of helicopters. I hope that the Government come to an early conclusion about them so that I can m speeches about something else. For once, I agree with hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North in comments about the operational direction of sup helicopters. I have been convinced for many years have spoken in the House on several occasions of the c view of those who are supported by the Royal Air Fo the soldiers in the field and to some extent other Ser personnel, that in practice it is not operationally effic to have a different service operating such a vital su route.

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke about the wh philosophy of helicopters. The first step that the cen staff should take is to make certain that those forces wh need helicopters for whatever purpose have control them from the very start. The Royal Navy, which has s control, stands out internationally as the finest oper of helicopters at sea. It has in many respects led the w and much of its success is due to its complete operati control over the training of pilots and the acquisitio aircraft right through to their manning in the ships.

There is a lesson to be learned there and i extraordinary that, year after year, we dodge this decis I know exactly why that happens. It is because the sh term, one-year cost of transition will no doubt expensive. In addition, there will be pressure from marshals who do not want to see the numbers of t forces reduced because that would mean fewer offi fewer promotions and other problems of that sort. N that we have the central staff, surely that is the sor barrier that can and must be broken down.

There is a further argument that some pilots who t for fast jets and cannot make the grade are transferre helicopter training in the RAF. I see no difficulty in cr Service transfers with RAF pilots going to the Army Corps. Some pilots already do cross-Service training it should be encouraged. I repeat my personal view b on my own experience and on the experience of liste to other hon. Members and talking to many Service m that this is crucial for our armed forces.

As for the future of helicopters, there are two rea why we are short of helicopters and short on decis about them. First, there is the tactical reason. I am s that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, (Mr. Mates) has left the Chamber. The Minister said he saw no immediate prospect of a change in the r between expenditure on armoured vehicles—I ass that he meant armoured personnel carriers as well as ta and on helicopters. That is sad because it means tha are miles behind in our thinking. The tank is increasi becoming a priority target on the battlefield and increasingly vulnerable to attack by sophistic weaponry held by the infantry and the armour of potential enemies. Experience shows that although

helicopter cannot withstand much fire, its mobility and flexibility more than counter this. For this reason, a better balance must be achieved.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend says that the helicopter cannot withstand much fire. A tank, if it is hit by a modern missile, will not withstand much fire either. Has my hon. Friend heard the expression that a battalion in time is worth a division too late? With a support helicopter, one can get a battalion there very quickly but with obstacles and bridges down tanks would take forever in today's circumstances to get to where they are needed.

Mr. Wiggin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I have argued that case in as much detail as time permits. I urge Ministers to harass their Service advisers until they get a better answer. I say this deliberately because it is not a decision that the military seem inclined to take at the moment. For reasons of their own, neither the air marshals nor the generals will take it. The Americans, the Russians and the armed forces of many other countries have made the decision and they are right.

The second reason why the Government's dilatoriness on helicopters is important is, inevitably, industrial. I make no bones about the fact that Westland has its products support factory in my constituency and is the largest employer there. I should like to read a short extract from the statement by the chairman of Westland plc. It is worth mentioning that from near-bankruptcy some 12 months ago, Westland has, as a result of a capital restructuring — the House knows what took place — become a prosperous company making reasonable profits, but it is left with this one question hanging over the helicopter division.

I think that there is unanimity in the House that it is unacceptable for Britain to be without a helicopter manufacturer. Indeed, the Secretary of State has said that he would abhor such a prospect. The chairman of Westland is clearly a responsible and most competent business man. He has led the company through difficult times and is improving its efficiency by the hour. I am sad to say that there is still some way to go, and I shall say the same to the trade union representatives who are to see me on Friday night. An improvement has already been effected but the chairman of the company says:

"Although studies and development programmes often lead to production orders eventually, they do little to sustain current order books. We have always made it clear that although our production lines are currently very busy in the Helicopter Division at Yeovil, we do face an order book gap some two years hence. The dominant position of the Ministry of Defence as a customer makes its long term helicopter policy of critical importance in planning the future shape and size of this division and we eagerly await the outcome of the last MoD studies.

These studies should be concluded this month and the Secretary of State for Defence said in the House of Commons in October 1986 that a decision would be taken in the new year. It may help to put this long time scale into perspective if I say that the Staff Target, which was generated first in 1978 for the replacement of the RAF Wessex and Puma fleet, is in abeyance and the Secretary of State has now, some eight years later, stated that the fleet will approach the end of its cost effective life 'within the next ten years'. Coherent planning against such widely moving target dates is frankly impossible."

Early in the Minister's speech, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) intervened and rightly reiterated the problems that will face the management at Westland unless a decision is forthcoming very shortly.

It is worth pointing out that the current problem was first revealed in July 1985 or perhaps even earlier. The company put its case to those of us interested in aviation. That was when the campaign started and, when air staff target 404 became a subject of attention in the House, but more than a year and a half later we are still awaiting a decision. We all know that the Secretary of State is sympathetic and is awaiting a solution from his advisers. I say this to Ministers—let us have a proper solution. We do not want half orders or a dribble of orders, but a proper order. What about 35 or 40 Black Hawks? What about showing the world that we can manufacture that helicopter in Somerset?

Once the RAF has that helicopter other countries will be interested, but we need that lead. The great benefit of the Sikorsky tie-up, the ability to sell Black Hawk in large areas of the world, will be negated if we do not manufacture and buy the aircraft ourselves. It is a fine helicopter and there are plenty of uses for it within our armed forces. It would be a good example and good value and, so long as Westland can deliver—I do not ask for any concessions — I believe that the money will be available from other programmes within the Department.

The concept that Westland should go out of helicopter production is totally unacceptable to me and to many of my hon. Friends. I am reluctant to raise the matter again, but we insist that the dates that have been mentioned this afternoon should be adhered to. If there were any question of there being no decision before Easter it would be catastrophic.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Although Woolwich is traditionally an Army town, Woolwich arsenal, the future of which is dear to my heart, provides a home for three RAF establishments. On that tenuous basis, I should like to add my tribute to those already given to RAF personnel to whom we owe so much for their contribution to the essential defence of Britain.

I was one of those in the 1970s who strongly supported the AEW Nimrod early warning system. It is right to say that hon. Members from both sides of the House would have been much happier if the contract could have gone to a British firm and to British technology, provided that the British solution could have fulfilled the job that was being asked of it. Sadly, on the basis of the evidence we have seen, it would have been too much of a gamble to go on hoping that the problems with the AEW Nimrod system could have been put right in time to enable it to provide what was required. It would have been wrong to undertake any such gamble with something as vital as an early warning system. Therefore, on the basis of the evidence available to us, I have to say that I believe that the Government made the right decision by choosing the Boeing AWACS.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: If that is so, will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why, when it came to a critical vote on that matter, the alliance was able only to abstain?

Mr. Cartwright: The position was made clear by our spokesman at the time. We were critical of the Government's handling of the operation. We thought that they had reached the correct decision at the end, but their handling of the matter before it came to that final decision

[Mr. Cartwright]

left a great deal to be desired. That view was taken by more than just the alliance. As the Minister knows, some of the Government's own supporters took a similar position.

I shall now move onto something a little safer. The Minister did not mention recruitment and retention in the RAF, but I assume that the Minister who is to reply will deal with those matters. It is worth recalling that in February last year the then Minister of State accepted that there were problems with the recruitment of officers and aircrew. The levels of recruitment were lower than had been hoped for and only 87 per cent. of target was expected to be achieved. The Minister accepted that there was increasing competition from civilian employers, especially in areas where there was a national shortage of specialised skills. It is clear that those are the areas in which the RAF can least afford to lose key personel.

The Minister also said that the rate of premature voluntary retirement among aircrew officers was on the increase. He suggested that applications were then running at a rate of 3 per cent. of trained officer strength. However, he did not tell us how many of those seeking premature voluntary retirement were fast jet pilots and navigators. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has reminded us, it costs over £2·8 million to train a fast jet pilot and £1 million to train a navigator. Therefore, in those areas, the RAF cannot stand much wastage.

I noticed that *Jane's Defence Weekly* on 17 January contained an interesting article by Air Vice Marshal Mason. It dealt with the general problem of personnel retention in the RAF. It was a balanced article and he reached the conclusion that there was not the crisis of retention that was being suggested in some quarters. However, he went on to say:

> "Nevertheless there has been a noticeable increase in PVR applications over the two years which, although now apparently levelling off, cannot be regarded with complacency."

We are aware of the increased competition from civil airlines, which are apparently facing a pilot shortage because of their failure to train pilots over a 10-year period in the 1970s. As we have seen in the press, British Airways has said that it will be advertising for over 100 qualified pilots in the autumn, and other airlines are expected to follow suit.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I cannot let the hon. Gentleman's last comment pass. Does he agree that it would have been inappropriate and wrong for British Airways to recruit people when there simply were not jobs available for them? It was one of those unfortunate questions of supply and demand and the demand for pilots was not there. It would have been wrong to recruit pilots simply to have them waiting around.

Mr. Cartwright: I did not intend to be critical of the civil airlines. I was merely pointing out the facts. I was not criticising the airlines for not having trained. The hon. Gentleman is right—the demand was not there. As a result, there was a 10-year dead period. However, there obviously comes a time when one has to try to attract trained pilots in order to meet what has become a growing demand. The obvious way of doing that is to obtain some of those already trained at substantial public expense by the RAF.

Retention is not a simple issue, and many facto involved. However, like the hon. Member for Kin upon Hull, North, I have seen suggestions tha condition of married quarters leaves a great deal desired. It would be helpful if the Minister could t whether the figure of 70 per cent. of RAF married qu not coming up to a reasonable standard is a gen accepted figure; whether reports that the cost of bri the married quarters up to a satisfactory standard, some £400 million, is an accurate assessment; and wh there are, as some people suggest, difficulti guaranteeing that sort of investment.

I should like to concentrate the rest of my remar air defence, especially defence against tactical ba missiles. That subject has raised substantial debate United States and Europe but it has not yet really su in Britain. The argument took off as a result celebrated article by Manfred Worner, the Ge Defence Minister, which appeared in the *Strategic R* in February 1986.

The scenario set out in that article was chillin argues that the latest generation of Soviet short- ballistic missiles has a much greater accuracy tha predecessors, has improved target acquisition an carry the so-called smart submunitions. He went argue that these missiles would give the Soviet Unio capacity to launch a conventional attack against hun of key NATO targets across western Europe. Amo vital facilities that he suggested would be at risk airfields, aircraft, ammunition stockpiles, radar in tions, command and control centres and vital N reinforcement facilities such as ports and bridges.

Hans Ruhle, the head of the German De Ministry's planning staff, has estimated that betwee and 300 key NATO targets destroyed by a Soviet range missile attack would prevent NATO building cohesive forward defence, prevent NATO from mob reserves and prevent NATO from landing reinforcer He suggested that the use of Soviet short-range miss that role would free thousands of Warsaw pact a that are now assigned for use against these vital N targets. Those aircraft would then be availabl deployment against ground forces in combat alo frontier.

Thus, the use of tactical ballistic missiles would gi Soviets an ability to impair or destroy NATO's c front defences without having to cross the n threshold. NATO commanders would then have t the appalling choice of using nuclear weapons or acc defeat.

As a result of that scenario, the German understandably active in promoting the case for wha call extended air defence. They want defensive sy capable of destroying short-range missiles as w aircraft deployed at the earliest possible opportunity of work is proceeding in that direction; the upgrad the Patriot system to enable it to engage missiles a as aircraft has been proceeding for some time.

There are also a number of more advanced proj the United States with exotic titles—the flexible guided experiment and the homing overlay experime both directed to providing short-range missile defe Isreal the Rafael vertical launch missile is in existen undergoing trial. In France the Aster system is studied.

More fundamental research on defence is taking place in Europe against short-range and tactical ballistic missiles. The European defence initiative is aimed at producing a European ATBM system capable of defending hardened military targets. A number of studies under that umbrella are being carried out under the aegis of the NATO Air Defence Committee. The argument for the Europan defence initiative offers the chance to develop the European pillar of NATO to provide opportunities for the European defence industrial base and to encourage European technology in the field.

There is also growing interest in the United States in the idea of extending the strategic defence initiative to provide missile defence in Europe. Congress has allocated $50 million to the co-operative development of an ATBM system. The Ministry of Defence has been awarded a contract to conduct an architecture study in that area. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Rogers, has regularly given his support to the concept of a defensive system against a Soviet short-range missile threat. After Reykjavik, we have serious propositions on the table to remove all intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe, and possibly to phase out strategic ballistic missiles over ten years. It is therefore inevitable that more attention will centre on the question of short-range ballistic missiles.

Four issues arise from the ATBM debate which are worth consideration. First, how seriously do we take the Soviet threat? Can short-range missiles be given the sort of accuracy that will threaten specific individual targets? Some experts argue that they cannot, that the main danger to Europe will continue to come from Warsaw pact aircraft, and that it would be unwise to switch resources away from traditional air defence to missile defence.

What sort of anti-tactical ballistic missile system do we look for? Destroying any missile in flight is a complex and expensive business. Also, we know that tactical ballistic missiles have shorter flight times—between six and 12 minutes, as compared with 30 minutes for a strategic system. Mobile missiles have more complex and less easily identifiable trajectories than the longer-range strategic systems. We are therefore in a difficult and extremely expensive area.

Before we rush down the road of exotic technologies, it is sensible to examine the role of passive measures. Target hardening, dispersal, improved runway repair facilities and other unexciting but effective systems might offer a more cost-effective method of defending against the short-range missile threat.

How would the Soviets respond if Europe was to deploy an ATBM system? They might simply increase the number of missiles and warheads they throw against the defensive system to overwhelm it. They might depress the trajectories of the missiles to make tracking and destruction more difficult. They might add electronic countermeasures to protect the missiles. There will certainly be some Soviet response. We must never lose sight of the fact that it will always be cheaper and easier for the attacker to improve the effectiveness of a ballistic missile attack than it will be for the defender to cope with that improved onslaught.

Lastly, and perhaps most worrying, there is the question of a link which a European anti-ballistic missile system would have to the American SDI and its impact on the ABM treaty. There is considerable United States interest in the whole area of European ballistic missile defence. Some people suggest that that is because it would be used as a stalking horse for SDI. The exotic technologies could be tried out in Europe to see whether they worked and they could then be deployed in the United States after the ABM treaty has collapsed.

This view is reinforced by the fact that Europe is not constrained by the ABM treaty, which applies only to the two super-powers. The ABM treaty deals only with defences against strategic missiles, and therefore does not appear to rule out defence against shorter-range systems. However, systems designed to defend against shorter-range tactical missiles could be used against longer-range systems. The trajectory of a submarine-launched ballistic missile is similar to that of a short or intermediate-range missile. Therefore, a system deployed and designed to tackle short-range systems may have an inherent capability to deal with strategic systems as well. There are also clauses in the ABM treaty that ban the export of United States ABM technology.

These issues are important, because the Government have committed themselves to the ABM treaty. They have also rightly supported the original, narrow interpretation of that treaty, which severely limits what is permissible beyond the stage of pure research.

Ministers in this Government have said little or nothing about the Government's attitude to the threat of tactical ballistic missiles, and we are entitled to ask whether the Government share the growing enthusiasm for the whole ATBM system that is now apparent in the United States and West Germany. It is important that the Government make their position clear, because there is a risk that an understandable anxiety to obtain as many SDI contracts as possible may result in Britain being sucked into the world of exotic technology, which is of doubtful military utility and will involve massive expenditure.

The alliance takes the view that, where resources are scarce, priority must go to essential and long overdue improvements in our bread and butter defences, not chasing a costly dream of a European star wars system.

6.38 pm

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who speaks for the alliance on these matters. It is a pleasure also to welcome him back to an official responsibility. These debates are always interesting and the hon. Gentleman dignifies them by his participation, but, I must tell him that the Liberals in Lancashire do not look upon his attitude to defence in the same way as I do. However, despite their incipient hostility to the hon. Gentleman's views on defence, he is welcome to come to Lancashire and talk about defence matters.

I usually like to speak about procurement and equipment matters, because of my constituency interest, but I want to touch briefly on what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), and, indeed, the hon. Member for Woolwich said about problems with premature voluntary retirement. I read the same article in *Jane's Defence Weekly* and was particularly concerned to see that PRV has risen substantially in the past two years. That is not something to be extremely exercised about, but it causes some concern. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North suggested that turbulence, the problems of the increasing desire of service wives to have their own careers and a widespread dissatisfaction with service accommodation were matters

[Mr. Robert Atkins]

to which the Minister should address himself when he replies. If he does not do so then, perhaps he will talk to us about it subsequently.

I want to deal with two particular success stories in my constituency. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) is not present. He is an old sparring partner of mine in debates on the RAF. I wanted to tell him of a particular success story in my constituency. In British Aerospace, Samlesbury, over the past few years 100 apprentices, in batches of between eight and 10, have completely restored a mark 19 photo-reconnaissance Spitfire which used to be the gate guardian at RAF Brawdy and is to be delivered to the RAF Memorial Flight. This is an astonishing achievement, because they maintain that it is now better than it ever was. It flew between 1945 and 1957. I believe that it is to be handed over either today or tomorrow. It is a great tribute to those apprentices that that aeroplane looks so fine and will continue to fly for many years because of their work.

It is the same apprentices, perhaps a little older, together with the more adult work force at British Aerospace, who have devoted so much of their time and energy to the experimental aircraft programme—EAP. This is the first British fighter for many years, and many hon. Members will have seen or heard of it flying at Farnborough this year. It is of brilliant design, with excellent production, support, and, above all, display, which again emphasises the excellence of the work force.

I join the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North in his question about funding for the EAP. It is now grounded and there is some talk that it will not fly at Paris against the equivalent French aeroplane, or rather the less than equivalent French aeroplane. I want to add to the weight of the hon. Gentleman's questions about funding because of its importance to the European fighter in the future.

In the Federal Republic of Germany there is some concern. Negotiations are going on between Ministers here and other partners. I understand that the equipment and avionics companies in Germany are keen for the EAP to be used within Eurofighter, but that the airframe and engine manufacturers are not. Therefore, will my hon. Friend consider the matter and come back to us as soon as he can with some information about the Ministry of Defence's commitment to the EAP.

I am a little concerned about meeting the August deadline on the Eurofighter. As I understand it, there is to be a formal launch in about August, with a development and production programme following therefrom. The German elections—I believe that they are this Sunday—have caused some delays and may cause further delays if there should be a change of Ministers. That is entirely a matter for the winners of the German elections, but, none the less, it is important that, if there were to be a delay, Ministers in Britain should do all that they can to ensure that the learning curve is speeded up so that we do not have further delays.

I support the bidding rules that have been talked about by the Eurofighter consortium in relation to the United States. I know that the United States is getting a little upset because of its belief that it is being excluded from some of the equipment programmes because of our concern within the consortium as a result of the experience on Panavia, and presumably other programmes, over restrictions by the United States Government on potential sales particularly to Warsaw pact countries, and, to extent, but important here, to non-aligned cou know that American companies have expresse concern and we should tell them that they have d same to us in the past. We must not be prepared way without firm guarantees.

By the same token, I support the dem Eurofighter to ensure that if American companies participate they do so through equipment co within the four participating nations. That is impo emphasise and to support, and I hope that Minis take it on board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, Nor (Mr. Stern) and others may want to speak about relating to the Eurofighter engine. Rather than d House, I invite my hon. Friend to develop that po catches your eye. Suffice it to say that if it is Eurofighter it should have a European rather American engine. That is worth emphasising. I concerned about the radar, because there are d that. I emphasise strongly that for it to be a E fighter we should have European involvement.

I make yet another plea. Please, can we find a n this aeroplane? The French have found a name experimental aeroplane. It is, for those who are no in French, Rafale, which means a gust of wind. us here could draw scatological conclusions fr suggestion. We need a name for the aerople to giv style and romance. My hon. Friend the Mem Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) suggests T but perhaps this is not the time to go into that. to give the aircraft a name, to get it off the ground sense of the word, and for the sake of people in of the world who are likely to be building the ae the RAF and those interested in it. It needs a nam syle, and some romance, and as soon as possible

I have one or two questions on Tornado. Fir those hon. Members who have already spoken to I am extremely worried about the delays on Fo radar, and I know that many in the RAF are also on this score. The House should continue to press Friends, with the greatest possible deference, perh none the less, to press them hard, to get this so It is no earthly good having Nimrods, A Shackletons, or whatever, if the Foxhunter radar does not work properly. We must have that so quickly.

I want to ask about the attrition orders. So far, had only small attrition orders for Tornado. We be content with eight, nine, 10 or whatever it is. help if those orders were forthcoming. By the sam I want an unequivocal assurance that these aircr out of the Saudi Arabian deal will, quite rig replaced at the end of the contract, so that we do conveniently lose them and forget them. The RAF need them and we shall still need them within th

I am delighted, as many hon. Members will k success of Hawk. As a result of the rather sad closure of British Aerospace, Weybridge, much work will be transferred to the Warton division. T I am taking an increasing interest in Hawk. I am that the Swiss preference should yet again have the French in that context. Anyone who knew about the aeroplane would know that it ought has done so. I hope that we shall follow that

Ministers will know that the contract has not yet been signed, and we want to ensure that the French will not come back in and try to undercut in the way that they always do. Let us not miss this one.

By the same token, we need to ask some questions about what is being done by the procurement executive over the potential order for Hawks for the United States air force. There is a big order there which is being worked upon and we need to pursue that.

Let me deal now with a perennial problem which exercises many hon. Members—what is known as NIS, NATO identification friend or foe system, or IFF, as it used to be called. I want to know where we are on this. It is a scandal that it has taken so long to resolve the issue. It needs resolving. I know that there has been much discussion about this and all the various radar bands, and so on. I want to know whether we are on stream and when there will be a final solution to the difficulties.

The hon. Member for Woolwich talked about radar generally and airborne early warning. I have been particularly fascinated by some work in the United States, particularly by the United States air force, on what it calls OTH radar—over-the-horizon radar. This is fascinating work. Can my hon. Friend give me any information about that, if not now, in writing later? What work are we doing? Have we developed any areas, and are we working with the United States air force?

The other matter of great interest is SEAD—these dreadful acronyms, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement is so right—supression of enemy air defence. There is some interest in this because of the potential contract that could arise for Tornadoes. Hon. Members will be aware that the F4Es and F4Gs are being used together with the F16Cs and F16Ds, but that, with the German demand for development of the ECR Tornado, using either the HARM missile or ALARM missile, this potential contract for more Tornadoes has to be worked on. I hope that Ministers are putting their minds to this, and perhaps they will be able to give me some information about the project.

While on the question of the ALARM missile, I do not want to say any more than to ask: what has happened to it? It is becoming a matter of concern, especially in the context of British Aerospace perhaps being involved in negotiations with Royal Ordnance and the product liability problems that might arise.

We have heard that the Phantoms are to be re-winged at Brough. How many are to be re-winged? Is it the lot? If so, will this affect the F4Gs that we purchased recently?

I share hon. Members' concern about the Tucano. Although I am entirely happy that Short, being the magnificient company that it is, will meet the contract deadlines, I should like to know how it will do so. What is the delay on wing redesign? Is there a delay on the engine? When will delivery come back on stream?

I turn now to the general context of procurement. I am concerned about the Foxhunter radar. We have all been concerned about the Nimrods. Questions need to be asked on a continuing basis. I hope that the Select Committee on Defence will turn its attention in general terms to procurement, if only to update the excellent report that was produced under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) when he was in charge of that activity. That investigation exercised the minds of many hon. Members and was, if I may say so in the context of a RAF debate, a much cooler and calmer inquiry into procurement than when other matters, such as Westland and AWACS, featured in the broad political arena rather than in the specific RAF arena. We need to look at some of these areas, and the Foxhunter and Alarm give an ideal hook on which to hang questions.

I am delighted that at long last my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, together with, I presume, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, has devoted some attention to small firms in competitive procurement. His initiative on the small firms advice division and the research initiative is to be warmly welcomed, particularly the possibility of representation at Ministry of Defence research establishments, which has been offered to many small firms. I know that the Defence Manufacturers Association, so ably represented by Brigadier Dick Purvis in all its activities, would welcome this move. I am sure that the association would want more to happen. I extend congratulations on where we have got so far, but say, please keep it up.

Procurement is the subject of the future. What is going on with advanced STOVL, short take-off and vertical landing? We had a lead in short take-off with the Harrier, and so on. I recognise that we needed to go to America because of the major deals that were offered by the United States marines. I do not take kindly to anyone in the industry suggesting that we should retain this initiative entirely. We needed to go abroad, but having done so we should not lose the initiative in terms of advanced short take-off and vertical landing.

There is much to be done. A lot of work in being done in the United Kingdom on the type of engine that should be used in the future. Hon. Members who are specialists in these matters may wish to talk about the many variants. I am concerned that Rolls-Royce is quoted as saying that it is receiving official interest from the Ministry of Defence and is wondering what is to happen. Is this true? If it is true, why are we not showing official interest? I do not pose that question in any pejorative sense, but I should like to know what has happened and what is happening. There is a probability of a five-year delay before advanced STOVL can be expected to be active. We need some measure of commitment, even if it is only a nod and a wink.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Last summer I was in California and visited the Aimes research laboratory, a NASA establishment. Is my hon. Friend aware that scientists at Aimes are undertaking work into advanced STOVL and are very concerned at the lukewarm attitude of the United Kingdom? They told me that it would be most unfortunate if the United States were to go ahead with this alone without the United Kingdom. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a severe risk that unless we show a commitment from the United Kingdom Government the initiative could be wholly seized by the United States?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend, who is a specialist in these matters, reinforces the plea that I make to Ministers that we make a commitment. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be able to say something about this.

I dare to raise the chemical weapons problem in the absence of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who always cocks an eye when I talk about chemical weapons. This matter concerns me and is

[Mr. Atkins]

relevant to this debate, just as it is to a debate on the Army, Navy or defence generally. We know that the Warsaw pact has chemical shells. I guess that there is a possibility that it also has chemical missiles or chemical warheads within missiles. If it can use them with shells, it can use them from aircraft. I pose this question again, not believing necessarily that we need a defensive capability, but believing that we do need some understanding and some capability to recognise that this is a very real threat.

There are some who argue within the military mile—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State may well hear them more often than I do—that there will not be a nuclear war because the Soviet Union needs only to flip across a few shells or missiles, which will cause dificulties in terms of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare, the equipment that our soldiers, sailors and airmen would have to wear, and all the rest of that argument. I pose that question again, because it needs posing and it needs some sort of answer.

I am concerned that the United States Navy, admittedly with its economies of scale, is looking very hard at another British initiative, the airship. Does the Ministry of Defence have an interest in the airship? Does it have any connection with it now? Does the Ministry have a role for it, or will it go abroad and be lost because we cannot produce a requirement for it?

The Ministry of Defence has a large usage of helicopters which have an impact on civilian activities. With the closure of the Trigg Lane site, the usage and conjestion of the Battersea heliport, which is used greatly by the Ministry of Defence, is causing concern. I know that the Ministry of Defence and the Minister of Transport are keen to do something about that. Is my hon. Friend the Minister able to say anything about any delays that there may be in the Department of the Environment or anywhere else, and what pressure he is exerting to resolve the problem?

I have been asked by the Society of British Aerospace Companies to ask what is happening at Farnborough. Have the problems over the enclave been resolved? Has the society been able to see plans on the division in Farnborough? What is the future of this great air show, the window that we provide as the best possible demonstration of the virtues of the British aerospace industry, of those who participate in and produce goods for it and of those who sell for it? It is crucial that Farnborough develops and that any difficulties between the MOD and the SBAC on the future of Farnborough are resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

I have spoken for too long as usual, but my plea is that I only ever speak in this debate and therefore try to concentrate on it. There is an enormous amount of good news in the aerospace and aviation industries, and the RAF is often the beneficiary of it. A remarkable amount has been done with defence sales, as I said in an intervention, with the exports that the aerospace industry has provided and the quality of work done by RAF pilots and aircrew the length and breadth of the world in a variety of environments. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and ask him to pass those congratulations on to the RAF for the work that it does, coupled with the enormous regard and respect that we have for the aerospace industry, its engines, airframes and equipment. We have done pretty well so far. Keep it up.

6.59 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): It is a
follow the hon. Member for South Ribble (M
He asked about 25 questions and if the Ministe
answer half of them we should need an exten
debate until midnight. The hon. Gentlem
suggested how the Defence Committee should
itinerary for some time into the future. The
already has so many subjects that require co
so many films to watch and so many procureme
to analyse that the hon. Gentleman should per
us on how long we should take on the
Parliament might need to be extended until a
before the Committee could consider half the s
it wished to investigate. It is a shame tha
Gentleman is not a member of the Committee
cannot indulge his enthusiasm among hon. Me
similar interests.

I shall ask not so many questions as the ho
for South Ribble, but I wish to consider thr
areas. The first concerns the vexing, continui
fatal, problems affecting NATO. The sec
relates to the first, is the growing divergenc
between the American element of the Allian
European element but between those who see
as democratic Socialists and those who see th
Liberals or Conservatives. Unless both sets
are resolved, there will not be a real compron
aspirations of those who view NATO in apoca
may be realised. It is in the interests of all ho
that those differences are resolved.

Transatlantic frictions have been with us sin
origins. It is often forgotten that the impetus fo
NATO came from Socialist parties in Europe,
people are Ernest Bevin and Spaak. For man
Socialist parties in NATO countries have helpe
the Alliance. It is therefore imperative that the
which have emerged in recent years should
sorted out.

Discussions on the current validity, futur
and strategy of NATO are taking place at
there are signs that the transatlantic differe
range of security and foreign policy issues a
wider. Those criticisms do not emanate simp
Left. Many people in the United States and i
wing and centre parties in NATO are expr
reservations about NATO's directions.

I shall mention only a few of the
differences. There are differences over econo
arms control, nuclear weapons and nucle
chemical weapons and neutron bombs, ab
policy, for instance, on central America about
to terrorism—for instance, the American
Libya—and about out-of-area activity, bur
and decision making. One could spend
enumerating the many other differences b
Alliance. One author recently epitomised thes
when he said:

"In recent years, an air of crisis has hung hea
Atlantic. Americans have accused Europeans o
anti-American thoughts and of risking self-Fi
Europeans have countered with charges that
turned into an irrational ally with a fascination
power whose follies could drive Europe into an
and devastating war."

The differences are expressed by many sources and many political parties. If they are not addressed and contained, the Alliance will face fragmentation.

I belong to that group of people—as, I hope, do the majority in the Labour party—who believe that the future security of this nation, Europe and America is bound up in a continuation and strengthening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It has served this country and many democratic nations well and I hope that it will continue to do so for many years.

In recent years, Socialist parties have emerged which were in the van of setting up NATO and which helped to sustain it. Nevertheless, perceptions have diverged. New policies have not burst forth or come from a vacuum. Indeed, for a number of years, Socialist parties have been questioning NATO strategy in many different forums that have emerged. Their policies can almost be seen as alternative or Social Democratic security policies. These emerging parties include Socialist International, Scandilux and Eurosud. It is important to point out that, although all these parties — that of the Danes, the SPD in Germany and the British Labour party—are critical of NATO, they begin their policy documents by reiterating their parties' support for the continuation of a north Atlantic Alliance.

The people who advocate those policies—I view them from an objective, even dispassionate, perspective—are only one side in the argument. One can look at the other and see those who believe that NATO's current security policies exacerbates the threat to the Alliance. They propose policies which some people view with considerable anxiety. American initiatives such as SDI, opposition to nuclear-free and chemical-free zones and concepts such as deep strike are encountering criticism. Unless there is some compromise in NATO and other forums, the future of the Alliance is a worrying issue.

An acid test of the efficacy of the alternative policies might be the West German elections in the near future. The SPD, which is similar to the Labour party, is pursuing policies similar to those of the Labour party, although it appears to be less unilateralist than the Labour party. The German electorate's verdict on a range of SPD policies, including security, will be interesting. It might give some pointers to the British Labour party on the future direction of electoral opinion in this country.

My third point has had some publicity this week. Rumours have been circulating for some time that Britain is reviewing its commitment to NATO in Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein in the form of the United Kingdom mobile force. Some people might say that Denmark is a faraway country in which we have little interest. Some might ask, "Why should we worry about stationing troops in Denmark?" One must obviously add that, in terms of the military balance, Denmark occupies a strategic position of critical importance to NATO's future. We spend a great deal of time looking at the central region and perhaps less time than we should looking at the northern and southern flanks. In view of Soviet military strategy, the flanks are in many ways indistinguishable. British forces in the central region could be outflanked via Denmark and the Baltic, so the northern and central regions must be seen as inextricably entangled.

Denmark may be a minor military power but it is of overwhelming geo-strategic importance. British forces committed to that country in time of tension or war are vital to our security. What are our commitments to Denmark? Paragraph 432 of the statement on the 1986 Defence Estimate states:

"The United Kingdom Mobile Force (1 Infantry Brigade and logistic support) is earmarked for deployment in tension or war to the Allied Forces Baltic Approaches, where it would reinforce either Denmark or Schleswig-Holstein. The RAF's recently strengthened Air Transport Force could be available to assist with the deployment of reinforcement forces."

Obviously, in any crisis the Royal Air Force would have a major role operating above and around the Baltic approaches. Therefore, as a previous Secretary of State for Defence said when he admonished the Danes a couple of years ago, some 20,000 young British men may be putting their lives at risk for the security of Denmark. Therefore, we have a great interest in what that country does, just as it has in what we do.

If there is any truth in the strong rumours circulating that the Government, to match commitments and resources, seek to curtail, withdraw and cut the United Kingdom mobile force, hon. Members on both sides of the House should resist that strongly because it is not subordinate or superflous to our interests. What happens to our security in the Baltic approaches is as important to our defence as what happens on mainland Britain. I have put a number of formal parliamentary questions to the Minister for written answer. I should like a reassurance, following the words of the Under-Secretary of State last week, that there are no plans to revise that policy. I hope that that statement will prove to be correct.

Many people, not least in Denmark, are obviously worried about this and it is important that that reassurance is given. If it is not given, the Government must be prepared to accept a great deal of criticism, and rightly so. This is not a debate on the Danish White Paper, but if one looks at the vulnerability of NATO in that area and the volume of Soviet and Warsaw pact forces that may be directed against Denmark, the timely arrival of 20,000 British forces would be absolutely essential. Denmark is a small country. Despite its home guard and small forces it could not sustain a defence effort for any time without the timely arrival — indeed, the arrival before a conflict starts — of the British and the Americans. Unless we arrived in time, that country would be lost and Britain's strategic vulnerability would be adversely affected.

We should consider what the Soviet armed forces have. The Baltic fleet consists of 24 amphibious warfare vessels and 100 amphibious assault craft. It also has 135 tactical strike aircraft such as Backfire, Badger, Blinder, Fitter and Forger. These could be joined by a possible 200 aircraft from the Soviet air force. Many other forces are available to Warsaw pact countries. Indeed, from reading literature emanating from the Soviet Union it is obvious that it appreciates the importance of Denmark for British forces and for NATO. The Soviet Union fully realises that, if it could acquire Denmark in time of conflict, it would win game, set and match.

What is Denmark's alternative defence view? Seeking some aid and comfort, I have read the bible — the alternative defence prospective, or defence without the bomb. That is the report of the alternative defence commission. On page 124 it states:

"The Soviet Union could either adopt two approaches to a full-scale attack on western Europe. The first is one which does not figure largely in present NATO planning but which appears in principle plausible. The Soviet forces would attack the relatively vulnerable Norway and Denmark first, go on to Britain and only then concentrate on central Europe. In that

[Mr. Bruce George]

case Britain could mount a military resistance in the hope of eventual victory and, even if overrun by Soviet forces, could still harry them by partisan tactics and sabotage."

Although many people may question the concept of deterrence, I should like to see an alternative concept to deterrence put rather more formidably that it has been in recent years before I am prepared to abandon the concept of deterrence as the only means of protecting this country and the rest of the Alliance.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meironnydd Nant Conwy): The hon. Gentleman referred to a report of which I was one of the signatories. Will he explain the political context in which he envisages the Soviet Union invading Denmark?

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman may look at a whole variety of scenarios. I am not saying that a conventional conflict is imminent, because if NATO is strong there will be no conflict. When one considers the vulnerability of NATO, the growing sophistication and numbers of Soviet and Warsaw pact forces, and some allies who are decidedly vulnerable on their own, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that a defence policy can be devised simply on the basis of hoping that the Soviet Union will never have any aspirations to expand, he is naive beyond words. I do not belong to the gang or group who would argue that somehow we must challenge the Soviet Union, but I should want our defences to be viable and reasonable, so that if there were a likelihood of conflict, any adversary would be neutralised.

Mr. Thomas: That is no answer.

Mr. George: There are several scenarios. If the hon. Gentleman cares to discuss this in more detail, I shall be only too willing to do so.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will my hon. Friend cast his mind back to the point that he made about a possible Soviet strike across the Norwegian border? If we needed to resist that possibility, would it not be better for the Norwegians to take the electricity that lights that frontier from their own sources rather than from the Soviet Union, or is the Soviet Union such a great threat in those circumstances?

Mr. George: I do not think that denying the Soviets electricity will slow them down especially. If we are to devise a defence strategy, some aspects of the alternative defence approach should be considered carefully. Increasing the lines on reserve is important, but several of the strategies that one reads about—not just in Britain but elsewhere—must be ancillary to a conventional strategy of deterrence and not a substitute for them.

From the literature, one gains the impression that guerrilla warfare and fighting in the streets is seen as a substitute. There is certainly a history of resistance to aggressors in the part of the country from which the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) comes, but in other parts of Britain there is certainly no Yugoslav partisan tradition. As someone once said, "All that would slow down the Soviets if they reached England would be the contraflow system on the motorway."

Defence policy must be proper, balanced and conventional. The majority of Labour Members would argue that we do not need to shelter behind the American nuclear umbrella. Nevertheless, until it is proved to me that Britain would be safe without NATO, I shall rest on the past attitude of the Labour party since 1
been a balance between NATO and its arm
and a major contribution to NATO's
defence.

In conclusion, we are entering upon a p
the defence debate will enter the minds of
the public. In some ways an electoral atmo
things and causes more problems. Undoubte
are in difficulties with their defence
Government simply cannot match their com
their resources; the Labour party, accordi
poll data, does not have the overwhelming
electorate for many of its proposals; a
alliance, I am not quite sure what its policies
happens in the election, it is important t
commitment to NATO until such time as th
be disbanded. I repeat, as chairman of
committee of the North Atlantic assemb
whose commitment to NATO is high, that I
of shame whatever in wanting to see NAT
such time as Britain's security is at suc
alliances could perhaps fade away, but tha
the near future.

Mr. McNamara: I congratulate my h
explaining so emphatically to the Ho
principles of the Labour party's defence p

Mr. George: I am delighted that my hon
my views so akin to his own.

I hope that the distortion of an electoral
not blind the public and the parties to
problems besetting the United Kingdom
Unless it is possible to reconcile those d
unless concessions are made both by those
wing and by the United States and those
perception of security, the Alliance will f
deeper and more dangerous than it has exp
time since 1949.

7.19 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): First,
the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr.
courage, interest and honesty that he has sh
matters.

Mr. George: In the light of the last spee
and the consequences of receiving the plaud
the hon. Gentleman be so kind as to straig
and say how much he disagrees with much
said?

Mr. Walker: I was touching on the ho
honesty and integrity, which does not ne
that I was agreeing with him. One must n
simply because I say that someone has
honest that I necessarily agree with him. C
will be disagreements in matters as con
Indeed, I do not always agree with my ho
have a responsibility and duty to the nati
in these matters and if we cannot be ho
debates, when can be honest?

I wish to remind the House that I hav
declare. A few days ago the RAF advised
extending my commission to my 60th birth
I shall continue to make that declaration

I congratulate the Government on selec
early warning system which works. More

the RAF wanted a system which worked. The system will provide the eyes for our air defence. However, I cannot say that I am 100 per cent. satisfied with it, because I am not. None of the systems would do the job as we hoped, but of the systems available now, we have undoubtedly chosen the best.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) touched on the problem of the NATO identification of friend or foe system. It is important that that is dealt with soon. It is interesting to talk about the difficulties that are being faced in all our high technology areas as we seek to reach parameters of the achievable in an attempt to operate equipment and systems — for example the difficulties with the Foxhunter radar. The Tornado is a fine aircraft, but if we cannot get the radar to function, it will not be the fine aircraft that the crew require.

Hon. Members with any knowledge of aircraft know that most of the unserviceability that occurs in operational fighting conditions is not with the aeroplane or the engine, but with the gubbins — the stuff that is put in. Inevitably, we have found the radar, radio and electronics to be faulty at some time. One can live with some faults, but not with others.

I am worried that we hear so much today, especially from the Labour Front Bench, about how conventional forces will provide a deterrent to the Soviets. I remind them that there is not a single area of modern high technology where we have not had some difficulties. We seem to be growing ever more dependent on complicated radar and communications equipment and the more we depend on them, the more vulnerable we shall be if the equipment is in any way suspect. As yet, there is no known viable alternative to the nuclear deterrent capability. I have yet to meet an air marshal who is opposed to Britain having a nuclear deterrent capability and who says, "We should not have Trident." The RAF recognises that Trident is an essential part of our deterrent capability.

We must look carefully at the next generation of aircraft. I was delighted to see an experimental aircraft flying at Farnborough. I am sorry that there appear to be short-term difficulties and that the aircraft is not being used as extensively as we would wish. I remind my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that it is not only the Harrier GR5 which must survive over the battlefield day and night, but, more important, the European fighter aircraft, which is to be the air superiority aircraft—the first since the Hunter—which must fly and survive in battlefield conditions. It is important that we get the right aircraft and equipment on time. I also remind my hon. Friends that the F16, the world's most formidable air superiority aircraft, began life as a demonstrator. Therefore, I hope that that is sufficient incentive to get our demonstrator aircraft back into the air.

At the beginning of the debate, mention was made of the role of helicopters in rescue squadrons. I add my congratulations to those rescue squadrons to whom we also owe a great debt. They regularly fly in the hills in my constituency to remove unfortunate people who have got into difficulties on the mountains, especially in ski areas. They do a splendid job and we must never take it for granted.

Although it is important to have a viable, working relationship on the battlefield with helicopters it is not easy to marry the needs of Army helicopter pilots with the needs of RAF helicopter pilots. RAF helicopter pilots must do more than fly into a battlefield. That is why their training is longer and more expensive. Therefore, in considering the use of helicopters, we must not forget that the most important ingredient in the helicopter is the chap who flies it. We must make certain that we do not undervalue him and I am sure that the RAF will not do so. If there were a merger, someone might think that an RAF pilot would get by with the Army's less expensive training programme, but I would caution against that.

I agree with what was said earlier about the problem of replacement helicopters. I should like to see a decision soon on the future of replacement battlefield helicopters. I should also like soon to see the auxiliary helicopter squadrons that I was promised some time ago. I am still waiting for them and hope that they are not far away.

Most hon. Members who live in rural constituencies will from time to time receive complaints about low-flying aircraft. I should like to place on record my views which I regularly give to constituents who complain. Indeed, my wife is convinced that the RAF uses our house as a turning point. It is essential that we continue to train our pilots to the high standards necessary to survive in modern conditions. We cannot do that without training them continually in low flying. If they are to avoid detection and being shot down, they must be able to fly fast and low.

I remind the House that people selected for this kind of task must have ability and what is called an aptitude to fly, but the most important single ingredient is motivation—a love to fly. There is no way in which one can have a fast-jet pilot constantly on duty who does not love flying because, quite frankly, he would be totally unsuitable and, for a variety of reasons, a danger to himself and everyone else. We must try, as early as we can, to instil in young people a love of flying. I shall give my further suggestions on how to do that later on.

I am pleased that the auxiliary missile squadrons, which do a splendid job, have expanded recruitment and that that is going well. Those of us who remember the days of RAF Transport Command are pleased to note that, at long last, we have developed this capability and ability to deploy overseas. I congratulate all those who were involved in the recent exercise in the Arabian gulf. Having served in that region as a young man, I know that it is not a part of the world that I would recommand for a vaacation. However, it is an important area for the defence of the United Kingdom's oil interests and we have to make sure that we can get a force out there to do a job in a short time. The deployment exercise made those who are interested in this aspect of operations very happy. We were delighted at the use of the TriStar tankers and how well they operated.

I have been interested in some of the observations by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) with regard to a non-nuclear capability. I have one question. How do the Nimrod aircraft, acting in their anti-submarine role, sink a deep-running Soviet submarine, once located, in the absence of nuclear depth charges? I want to know how those submarines will be sunk if we are relying on a non-nuclear capability. If the Opposition can answer they will be on the way to convincing me that somehow they can look after our maritime interests effectively. As yet, I have not had an answer from the Opposition—I do not believe that they know the answer.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister advise the House of the use of reserve officers on the

[Mr. Walker]

VC10s and the use of reserve QFIs at the university air squadrons. Those units should be encouraged and I have pleaded for that for years.

Perhaps Ministers will be able to give some details of aircrew and pilot training and how the Tucano, which was rolled out last week, has progressed. Are the Government satisfied that they can maintain the Jet Provost fleet at an operational level and an acceptable cost? If there are any exceptional costs, will these be charged to Shorts? The requirement, as I remember, is that they should deliver on time.

How is the programme going for the Chipmunk refurbishing? If we are to consider a replacement aircraft for the Chipmunk, it must be an aircraft that can excite, and be enjoyed by, not only the cadets who must fly it but also the volunteer pilots. The Chipmunk is unique. It has a tail down. It was designed in 1948 and it is reminiscent of the aeroplanes that I knew in my younger days. The people who fly the Chipmunk love it. If another aeroplane is put in its place, please let it have the attractions of the Chipmunk.

An important area to consider, and one of importance to me, is that of air cadet studies. I am very pleased at the interest that the Front Bench has shown in this and I would also like to include in my thanks previous Ministers at the Ministry of Defence for their interest. May I also take this opportunity to place on record the thanks of the Air Cadet Organisation to Air Marshal Sir John Sutton, C-in-C of Support Command and the support of Air Vice Marshal Don Spottiswood of Support Command. They have taken a keen day-to-day interest in the affairs of the cadets. It is marvellous that senior officers are interested in the young men who are the future Royal Air Force. Thanks should also be given the staff at the headquarters of Air Cadets RAF Newtown and thanks for the continuing interest of the staff of the Central Gliding School at RAF Syerstom and also the volunteer officers of the air experience flights, the volunteer officers of the volunteer gliding schools and the volunteer officers of the squadrons.

In the debate on 1 July last year I raised some specific questions. Although I do not expect the Minister to answer those questions this evening—I understand, in the time available, that would be unlikely — but I should be grateful if the Department could give me some information soon.

I wonder if the Minister has been advised of the situation at 661 Volunteer Gliding School which is based at Kirknewton? The United States air force plans to take over that base. We welcome the United States forces and it is my experience that when a volunteer gliding school has operated from a United States air base, the United States has always been a good host. At that base there is a need for Falklands-type hangars to house the gliders. At present, portakabins are having to be used and it is difficult to maintain morale when gliders have to be kept in trailers. There is also no accommodation for the staff; they are doing their best in what might be called a "current category" situation but it is extremely difficult.

I also wish to know what is happening with 641 Volunteer Gliding School—I raised this matter in our last debate in the House—concerning the possible use of a former RAF base at Anston, which is now an Army base. The aircraft flying from that base could use the radio to satisfy Newcastle airport for air control p sailplanes are well equipped and can be c any other aircraft. That would be activating that unit. There is some security of tenure at the Volunteer Glidi Ma'ling. Perhaps the Minister will enc authority to give the Air Force a lease l months.

What is the situation with regard replacements and winches? There is n present winches are not good enou modern sailplanes which are too heavy f is a particular problem when there is a has happened about my previous plea fo launching gliders? Unlike conventional launching glider can operate off the run Grobb 109, which is a less expensive air the job.

What has happened about the advanc which a decision was reached some tim should happen about the second gliding which was also agreed? We should experienced pilots who have previou different aircraft such as the Hercules, th transport and communication aircraft. I proposition that those who fly the C senior ex-RAF officers — should be c two or three-week courses so as to knowledge of those aircraft for which th a licence.

I said that I would return to the officers who man the air experience fli gliding schools and the squadrons. I that these gentlemen get no pay. The o are paid is when they attend full-time all their time voluntarily and unpaid. M or 30 years' service. Indeed, some are n service. They attend units, often for eve year. How many hon. Members know almost every weekend of their life to sor golf?

I ask the House to give this matter because 20 or 40 years of attending gliding schools and air experience fli three evenings a week for the squadron work. Is it not time that we reviewed th award honours to this unique group o

My hon. Friend the Under-Secreta Armed Forces will find that less than a are awarded to this group of people ea can serve 30 years voluntarily, giving weekend, and receive no more recogni you" letter. Ought we not seriously to these people in the honours system? M honours or awards for their everyday the Services. Should we not give more not suggesting that we take anything a but that volunteers should get a bit m

I hope that I have not kept the H these are important matters. I am the who speaks up for this group of peopl I hope that the House will bear with m case. I should like to thank my hon. F Bench—the way in which they look appreciated.

7.41 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): This may be a sad occasion for me, as it might be the last time that I take part in a debate on the Royal Air Force—it all depends on when the Prime Minister decides to call the general election.

I have always enjoyed these debates. It is fascinating to reflect on the fact that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I are the only Members in the Chamber who served in the 1939-45 war. In the 22 years that I have been here, there have frequently been substantial numbers of hon. Members facing me who also served in that war.

I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that the hon. Members for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) made speeches from which he will draw little comfort, because they told him what is not available in the RAF. I sometimes think that if Back Benchers who are involved in aviation and RAF matters were heeded, we would have a better equipped Air Force.

This also happens to be the anniversary of the Save-the-Baby campaign, in which I have been involved. In the recent extremely bad weather, great rescue services have been provided by the Armed Forces using helicopters. Today, I tabled a massive number of questions in connection with that campaign concerning perinatal death and disability. Could the RAF help one stage further by providing facilities for pregnant women who are at risk? The RAF might get them into appropriate units early. The job would be well worth while—it would prevent handicap and form a useful training exercise for the RAF. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am having great difficulty hearing my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) because of the conversation that is going on on the Front Bench below the Gangway.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I hope that if hon. Members wish to conduct a conversation, they will do so outside the Chamber.

Mr. Carter-Jones: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they were not troubling me. They would not have stopped me speaking.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I am very sorry.

Mr. Carter-Jones: The Minister took great credit for the new European fighter aircraft, but the battle for the aircraft was fought on the Back Benches on both sides of the House. The Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces ought to be told of the services rendered by Back Benchers who persuaded the Government that the aircraft was essential. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), who were Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry respectively at the time, will bear that out.

While we were bringing pressure to bear on the Ministry, we were worried about slippage in time, as we were about late ordering. If we wanted to have an agile fighter for, say, 1993, that opportunity has gone. The right hon. Member for Henley eventually decided to go it alone with the Germans and the Italians. The Spanish joined us later. That was as much a Back-Bench effort as one made by the Secretary of State for Defence. There has been tremendous collaboration across the Chamber on RAF matters.

Mr. Bill Walker: We will miss the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Thank you.

We are anxious that the hon. Member for South Ribble can express anxieties about the EFA slipping further away. My little homily has changed a little from my early days in the RAF, but there are three parts of an aircraft nowadays—the power plant, the airframe and the avionics. If we supported our aircraft industry strongly enough, our technology base would be that much stronger. Unfortunately, that is not always understood by the procurement department of the Ministry of Defence. It causes me more worries than our potential enemies. I sometimes wonder whether it is our friend.

We have experienced anxieties about the on-costs of Nimrod. I support the idea of fixed-price contracts, but we should not be too rigid, as technology in this area tends to progress rapidly. If we stick too rigidly to a fixed-price contract, we will miss opportunities to enhance the quality of the aircraft being built.

Perhaps the Minister will take a message back to the Ministry. It is that Mr. Levene may be doing a good job in terms of achieving competition, and he may be trying to eliminate the cost-plus principle, but he ought not to be too rigid or we might find that good developments, which ought to be incorporated, are left out. We have to guard strongly against that.

We have several worries about the EFA. People are hedging their bets. The Germans are not quite so keen and do not have the correct sense of urgency. If we have 1995 in mind as the date when the EFA will be brought into service, we are in danger of losing that target. It is the suggested that we can refurbish Phantom. That seems to be the solution which the Germans have in mind. There is grave danger in that, but it is the sort of thing that happens here. Certain decisions are influenced by things called general elections. It is a funny old world, but that happens all over the place.

As I have said before—this may be the last time I say it in an RAF debate—the Department is heavy on reviews. We have had more than enough of reviews but we have not had the aircraft. We have not had the engine because decisions are deferred again and again. A distinct slippage is appearing in the European fighter programme. British Aerospace is doing a good job and I am convinced that it is ready and willing to continue. We also have a proven engine for the aircraft, the one that powers the Tornado, the RB199. Initially that would be a very good engine for the launch of the EFA. Coming up in the background we have the EJ200, which will be the European jet engine for the EFA.

I must give a warning. I hope that I am not too parochial British about all this, but I am getting worried about people pushing forward American engines, American airframes and American concepts. Unless we are careful we will find that other nations say that they want the General Electric engine in the EFA.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman knows that I share entirely his patriotic view of the importance of buying British. However, does he not agree that we have a substantial two-way street between ourselves and the United States, and that even a former Labour Secretary

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

State for Defence, Fred Mulley, said that it was not always possible to buy British. Whilst we must be patriotic about these matters, does not the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a valuable two-way street and that a vast amount of British equipment—for example, the Hawk, the Harrier and other weaponry — goes to the other side of the Atlantic?

Mr. Carter-Jones: The hon. Member is wise to remind me of that. He is right, of course. All I am saying is that where we have the appropriate supplies available for manufacture in this country, they should be bought in this country. I have not gone for any alternatives. I have stuck with the view that there is available a superb British engine and its derivative. I accept that this is also the case with the airframe. We talk ourselves down far too much. I reiterate the request of the hon. Member for South Ribble that this project is not allowed to slip. I understand that tomorrow there has to be a submission for the new engine.

I have mentioned the ordering policy. I ask the Minister to bring to the notice of his Department the concern expressed by several of his hon. Friends about the way in which procurement proceeds. It is always tomorrow, never today. Lots of things are not ordered for reasons not always of defence. Perhaps the hand of the Treasury comes in. But the Secretary of State, not the Treasury, is responsible for defence.

On the Tucano, people say over and over again that the Royal Air Force must have the choice to buy what it wants. People say that when it is convenient. It was said, for example, when it applied to Nimrod. But it did not apply to Tucano. I am not saying that the Tucano decision was incorrect but it was not the choice of the Royal Air Force. There has been massive slippage. If the Minister were prepared to say, "We have a problem in Northern Ireland and there is a regional need to supply some economic support," I would accept that argument. I think he will find that on cost and on delivery time the Tucano will come late and more expensive than the Pilatus.

The Minister will have a chance to give us details. I ask him not to hide behind security. There are some questions I want to ask. What is the continuing operating cost of the Jet Provost? That question was raised first in the debate on the Conservative side. The Minister should tell the House about the recent subsidy of £36 million to Shorts. Was that for the Tucano? Quite a few replies should be given before the Minister shakes his head. Many people would like to know the answers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) developed the theme of Pilatus. If it is a case of regional help, the Department should bear in mind the fact that Hull and Humberside are as much in need of regional help as other places.

On the controversial issue, if low-level fast aircraft coming into this country constitute a danger, they are a danger now. The Government decided to buy AWACS. The first one will be delivered in 1991 and the others will come in succeeding years.

Mr. Frank Cook: Maybe.

Mr. Carter-Jones: As my hon. Friend says, maybe. In any case, there are doubts about whether sufficient have been ordered. Again I come back to procurement. I believe that the Nimrod debate was the least informed debate that I have ever attended in the House. The open contract with GEC was a mistake.

I accept that GEC did not perform all that well, but the trouble with the Department responsible for defence procurement is that it does not know when it has won. The Department made up its mind earlier and, as with the fixed-wing aircraft, it could not change. It stuck with its previous decision. However, the improvements which took place in the avionics of Nimrod within the last six months were dramatic. At that rate of progress, it would have been an extremely successful aircraft. If we have no defence at present by way of an early warning system, I am sure that two or three Nimrods, fitted with early warning systems, could provide at least some defence.

The disadvantage of clutter was referred to in that debate, but the clutter was in the arguments that were put forward in the House. People's minds were cluttered and they believed that the procurement section of the Ministry of Defence knew best. Some quite insulting observations were made. I find it strange that people should say that highly skilled Royal Air Force radar navigators are unable to distinguish between a moving target and a lorry. I have never heard so much balderdash in my life. They were comparing something moving at 60 mph with something at mach 2. Any skilled operator could detect the difference. Even I, at 66, with bifocals and glaucoma in my right eye, could spot the difference. GEC is owed an explanation. Just in case somebody feels that because I am throwing around names, I point out that I have no commercial interest in any company in this country.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Shame.

Mr. Carter-Jones: It may be a shame, but I am proud of it. It allows me to say what I want.

The Royal Air Force was not well served on this occasion. I am proud of some of our technical achievements in this sector. It would have been a good launch pad for our new technology in the wider civilian world. We tend to be making false decisions.

The helicopter story is even more disastrous than the Nimrod story. Years ago, Back Benchers on both sides of the House went to see the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement warning him of Westland's cash flow problems. We thought we were warning him. At least we cleared our consciences and told him. I am convinced that he knew already. That company was cruelly deceived. I repeat what I have said before. There was a tremendous row. No. 10 was seething and when the dust had died, two Secretaries of State had departed. However, there are fewer helicopters now than when the row had first started, but the demand and need for helicopters is always there.

How do I end what will probably be my last debate on the Royal Air Force? We should have faith in it. If we spend money training the aircrew, we should give them the best. Do not let some pen pusher in the Treasury make the decision. Do not start having further assessments of the situation. We know the needs. They are loud and clear.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in every instance where the Royal Air Force has been required to purchase a political aeroplane, it has always turned out to be a flop and has had to be replaced expensively later on?

Mr. Carter-Jones: I shall not be tempted down that path because my knowledge is not good enough, but I have

a suspicion that the hon. Gentleman may be right. The Ministry of Defence is the trustee of the nation's security. If it trains the staff, it should make sure that they have the appropriate equipment at the appropriate time.

8.2 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) in these debates, not least because he usually manages to cover at least half the points that I intended to cover and enables me to speak more briefly. Like my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) I shall concentrate largely on procurement issues. Therefore, I apologise to the House for the fact that I shall be adding to the library of acronyms that have been used so far.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement rightly referred to the Harrier GR5 as one of the more exciting technological prospects open to us as a nation. However, it is not just the aircraft that is in the forefront of technology. A number of aspects of the development of the aircraft and the equipment that will go on it are themselves keeping British technology at the sharp end of where aerospace technology is going.

In particular, I am thinking of the Pegasus 11-16 engine, which was successfully tested last year and is expected to be available in a production prototype in 1990, which has been proposed to the United States Secretary of Defence and on which a reply is expected shortly. I should be grateful for any pressure that the Government can bring to bear to ensure that this latest state of the art engine will be used, not just in the GR5, but for further developments in the Harrier.

In equipment terms, and again looking both at the Harrier GR5 and the Tornado, I should like to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to the development of TERPROM, the British Aerospace terrain reference navigation system, which has been successfully demonstrated on both the F16 and the Tornado. It has huge export potential, especially in the United States of America and other NATO nations. It would be suitable for the Tornado and GR5, and again is British technology at its best. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look closely at this project, particularly as I understand that it could be ready for demonstration on the Tornado in the current year.

My hon. Friend the Minister was warned that the flavour of the night in the speeches of some of my hon. Friends is advanced short take-off or vertical landing aircraft. I do not wish to repeat the comments already made by my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth). However, many Conservative Members are anxious at what appear to be developing—delays and possible lack of interest. We look forward to the most positive reassurance that my hon. Friend can give.

The project that has occupied much of the debate is the European fighter aircraft and its engine. My hon. Friend the Minister will not be surprised to learn that I wish to push him fairly hard tonight on the engine for the European fighter aircraft, both in its preliminary version and in its eventual version, because I hope that both engines will largely be built at Rolls-Royce in my constituency. Few people in this country believe that the logical choice for the initial engine for the EFA can be anything but the RB199. It is a proven engine with 500,000 flying hours. By the time of the first flight of the EFA prototype it will have notched up 1·5 million flying hours.

When the experimental aircraft project was flying, the RB199 was performing to specification within that project. I thought when I visited Farnborough last year that the sympathies of the audience went out to the manufacturers of the French plane, the Rafale, which, unfortunately, on the day that it was being shown against the experimental aircraft programme did not perform to specification. These things happen, and I am sure that we do not wish to make too much of it. In its existing version, the RB199 is European high technology which represents European employment and competitiveness. Its likely development into the EJ200 will continue to keep us at the forefront of technology.

Work has already started at Rolls-Royce on the development of the EJ200 and I know from speaking to the work force there that they have the highest hopes for this engine. They believe that this engine, with Rolls-Royce's reputation and the technical specification that has been agreed, promises to be a world beater. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will apply all the pressure that he can to ensure that the RB199 is given a fair crack of the whip, subject to satisfactory quotes for the initial engine —I understand that the quote from Turbo-Union is highly competitive—and that we can proceed as soon as possible with the EJ200 engine.

So far, this debate has been relatively friendly. Therefore, I apologise for now wishing to introduce a note of controversy. I am particularly sorry that, having been in his place for most of the debate, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is no longer in his place, not least because I wrote to him at the end of last week and advised him that I intended to raise the subject of a speech that he made in my constituency and attack him about it. I am sorry that he is not here to take the opportunity to respond.

On 10 December last the hon. Gentleman made a speech in Bristol—I am not quite sure where because, unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman did not let me know that he was going to Bristol or to what part of Bristol he was going. From a newspaper report, I understand that he visited Rolls-Royce in my constituency. The newspaper report states:

> "The European fighter aircraft, on which thousands of Rolls-Royce jobs may depend, will almost certainly be cancelled by the Conservatives to help pay for Trident".

This subject was raised in a debate in the House on 12 December. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North was repeatedly challenged to state the basis for his wild statement to people whose jobs depended on the subject about which he was speaking. The only basis that the hon. Gentleman could find was that no contract had yet been placed for EFA, but, as my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out to him in the same debate:

> "We are committed to playing our full part in the . . . project . . . It is self-evident that we cannot order the European fighter now because there is no aircraft to order". —[*Official Report*, 12 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 725.]

That was the last that we heard on the subject. I accept that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North may have made a genuine mistake or may have been desperate for something to say about Labour's defence policy that would not put him under attack, and chose to instil totally unnecessary fear and panic in my constituents and those of other hon. Members in surrounding constituencies.

[Mr. Michael Stern]

They believe that the RB199, the EJ200 and EFA together represent their future employment and security. They were told by a Front Bench spokesman for the Labour party that that security was under threat. It may simply have been desperation on the part of the hon. Gentleman, but I suspect that it was more than that. That was not the first time that EFA had been attacked by the Labour party in Bristol.

About a year and a half ago, when the EFA negotiations were at their height, Avon county council, which was then controlled by the Labour party, passed a resolution and insisted that copies of it be sent to all Members of Parliament for immediate action. I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has returned to his place. In its resolution, Avon county council suggested that, because of potential expenditure on Trident, the British Government were about to withdraw from the EFA negotiations and that as a result a substantial number of jobs at Rolls-Royce would be lost.

The Avon county council's resolution reached me on the same day as the Government announced that the negotiations had been concluded. Had the Labour party in Avon listened to what was said to it by the company, and by the work force, and had it listened to the sound political advice that it received, it would have realised that the resolution was complete nonsense. However, clearly, the Labour party considered it to be more important to poor-mouth EFA, to create confusion and distress among the employees of Rolls-Royce and to do as much damage as it could. I accept that, in the absence of a positive policy, if the Labour party chooses to attack a flying project, that is up to it, but my suspicions go deeper than that.

I should like, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to draw a parallel from slightly outside the subject of the debate. About two years ago, rumours started to be spread—we know not from where—that in his next Budget the Chancellor was about to announce major changes in the pension taxation policy and, in particular, that he was about to announce that pension lump sums would be taxed and that tax relief on pension contributions would be reduced. The Chancellor was not in a position to deny that charge in the period before the Budget. Many other hon. Members and I received one of the largest post bags ever, purely because of the rumours that were spread from we know not where. In due course the Chancellor announced that he would never have done such a thing without a Green Paper, and never would have considered it anyway.

It is significant that, about a year later, quietly in a speech to the National Association of Pension Funds, a Labour Front Bench spokesman announced that it was official Labour party policy to tax pension lump sums and to reduce the tax relief on pension contributions. That remains the Labour party's policy. My constituents and I fear that this is a pattern: Front-Bench Labour party spokesmen and important Labour party officials announced that the Conservatives will do something extremely damaging. I invite the hon. Gentleman to reply, now that he has returned to his place.

Is this anything more than a smokescreen to get defence spending down to the targets that Labour Members will set if they come to power? Is this a smokescreen that demonstrates that they intend to cancel EFA? After the hon. Gentleman's speech, my constituents are entitled t an answer to that question, and I invite him to intervene The hon. Gentleman does not wish to intervene on thi subject.

Mr. McNamara: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman i I catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for tha intervention. He has created considerable fear among m constituents. In common humanity, he owes them slightl more of an explanation of his unjustifiable comments tha he has given so far. I hope that if he suceeds in catchin your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will offer that greate explanation.

8.18 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Th hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr McNamara) does not require me to defend him from th hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), and shall not try to do that. I shall not break my self-denyin ordnance of not speaking publicly about the internal issue of the Labour party. I do not wish to take up procuremen issues. I had not intended to speak about strategic issues either, which are relevant to debates concerning the RAF but I have been provoked by the hon. Member for Walsall South (Mr. George) and the hon. Member for Tayside North (Mr. Walker).

On the strategic issue, there is a tendency for ou defence and services debates to be weapons led, t concentrate on military hardware and tactical deploymen and not to be related to the broad political and militar realities that are part of any rational debate of our defenc policy. The speech of the hon. Member for Walsall, Sout was a particularly fine example of the way in which whole scenario can be constructed on the basis of complet political unreality. I hope that the hon. Gentleman' speech will not result in a massive evacuation o Copenhagen this evening. The people of Denmark will b able, I believe, to sleep soundly in their beds, in the certai knowledge that there will not be a Soviet invasion. Tha kind of scenario leads only to more cold warrio approaches. It encourages the cold war attitude, and i leads to a mutual failure to understand and to mutua hostility.

Our debates on defence issues have to relate not just t procurement but also to arms control. In Royal Air Forc debates we recognise that the complexity of moder weapons systems leads to dual capability. The Tornad GR1 and the Buccaneer squadrons that are located in th United Kingdom and Germany are capable of bot conventional and nuclear operations. As we look to th ordering of further Tornado squadrons, we see that th immediate air defence of the United Kingdom wil inevitably become interconnected with NATO's strategi role. It is very difficult to distinguish between strictly ai defence roles and offensive roles.

In that context, I turn to the environmental impact o our defence policies. My remarks follow on from th speech of the hon. Member for Tayside, North, wh unreservedly supports the present low flying militar training policy. The Minister will not be surprised to hea that I shall return again to this subject. It is the one abou which I receive most complaints, not only from visitors t my constituency but also from residents. I make thes

complaints not as a criticism of the military options that the training exercises imply. I make them on the basis of the increase in training and also on the basis that other NATO countries, particularly West Germany, apply much tighter rules than we do to low level training. It is ironic that when RAF pilots carry out exercises in Germany they have to operate under much tighter rules than when they are operating over the air space of England, Wales or Scotland.

Since 1977, there has been a significant increase in the number of low-level flights over the United Kingdom. According to parliamentary answers that I have been given, there were 76,000 movements in 1977, whereas there are now over 130,000 a year. The last full year figures that I have are those for 1983, when there were 128,000 low level flights over the United Kingdom. The increase does not take into account the environmental damage that British pilots cause to the residents of North America. The people at Goose Bay in Canada are affected by military training. The residents of Nevada also suffer from the training exercises of the USAF, which are augmented by British training.

In 1979, the Labour Government's Minister with responsibility for the Royal Air Force, James Wellbeloved, changed that policy. Instead of there being a number of designated low-flying areas, with link routes mapped out, the whole of the country's land area was made available. We were told that this would ensure that the disturbance was spread more evenly. However, James Wellbeloved also said that the low flying system was

"too small to meet the demands made upon it."

We know now that the reason for the change in 1979 was not to spread the load more evenly. It was to ensure that the far greater number of training requirement movements that were necessary could be accommodated.

We are told that heights and speeds have changed. Before 1977, there was no low flying below 250 ft and at more than 450 knots. New areas were created then, some in central Wales and others in the north-west of Scotland. There was no consultation; the RAF does not require planning permission for these exercises. The legal basis of low flying is being examined; there is no clear definition in law of the Ministry of Defence's responsibility.

Apart from the designation of those new areas, and also additional areas in Cumbria and Northumberland, there is now low flying at 100 ft and 480 knots. Since 1977 there has been a substantial increase in night low flying, which causes serious concern to many people. It is 10 years now since a tragic crash just over the boundary of my constituency, when USAF airmen were tragically killed and a farmhouse was nearly the subject of a direct hit. That tragic accident occurred during night flying. As these night flying exercises increase, so public concern increases. Tornados and F111s are now permitted to fly automatically as low as 200 ft at night in bad weather.

I have to emphasise the contrast with West Germany. That is an environmentally conscious and "greener" country than the United Kingdom. That may be the reason for the controls in West Germany. Germany, a NATO country, is committed to the NATO strategy, but it is able to minimise the environmental impact of low-flying. The general height limit there is 500 ft. There are seven specific low-flying areas where low-flying is permitted down to 250 ft only. There is a general ban on low-flying at weekends. For some years the number of low-level flights has been constant at 110,000 a year. Further restrictions are being introduced. Skyguard mobile radars detect and deter infringements. A new ban was introduced in 1986 on low-flying in the middle of the day. A new system has been introduced this year, which will create 49 new low-flying areas, each of which will be used for a few weeks and then closed for several months to give the residents some peace. Speaking on behalf of the residents of the Snowdonia national park, most of whose area falls within my constituency, they would love to feel that they could have peace, not just on an occasional Sunday in summer.

There is a free-for-all low-flying training policy in the United Kingdom, and increasingly it is becoming environmentally unacceptable. The issue is being addressed not just by the peace movement. It concerns the environmental movement in general. The Council for the National Parks is very concerned about it, as are individual national parks. It is being pronounced upon by the farmers' unions. It is not an issue that the Ministry of Defence can fob off, as though it has been raised merely by the peace lobby.

The United Kingdom now has an opportunity to review low-level flights. I have asked the Department on previous occasions for reviews, but I have been unsuccessful in obtaining a review. However, the important NATO committee on the challenges to a modern society is studying aircraft noise. I have asked both the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Defence questions on this issue. I was surprised to find that apparently the Department of the Environment is not represented on this committee. Presumably Defence is the lead Department, and no doubt part of its function is to keep a check on the environment.

The committee was initiated by the West Germans. It is also staffed by the United States and was set up because of anxiety about the impact of low-flying. I hope that the study is looking at the issue in terms of solutions and in terms of minimising environmental impact, and that it is not merely some sort of PR exercise. Does not the United Kingdom look rather bad when measured against the efforts and initiatives taken in West Germany to lessen environmental impact? I hope that there will be a clear United Kingdom commitment to the work of this committee, that we will not try to prevent or frustrate any positive recommendations by the committee about inspection and control, complaints procedures and environmental monitoring.

I hope that the study group is investigating the United Kingdom's system and our controls and comparing them with other countries. I also hope that the RAF and the Department will take seriously the need to minimise environmental impact as more emphasis is placed on faster and lower flying and on more night flying. Perhaps the Minister will reply to me in this debate or in detail in writing. I draw his attention to recent information from Germany about the public perception of low-flying.

The December issue of the West German *Tribune* published a poll in which half the people questioned said that they did not believe national security depended on military aircraft practising low-flying. More significant is that, of the people questioned in the Rhineland Palatinate area of West Germany, 30 per cent. felt that their health was affected by low-flying, one in six had insomnia and 3 per cent. had been to a doctor because of aircraft noise. Some 29 per cent. saw the aircraft as hazards to safety and, as I say, nearly 50 per cent. said that there was no direct

[Mr. D. E. Thomas]

connection between their national security and low-flying training. In the poll 28 per cent. said that they had been shocked by the noise at a particular time and eight out of 10 people said that low-flying aircraft were disturbing them.

There are no surveys of that kind conducted in the United Kingdom. I suggest that the Department should conduct such surveys by commissioning a reputable independent polling organisation, of which we probably have too many these days, to conduct that kind of survey so that we can assess public feeling and can move towards greater environmental controls. We need to review not just training and the environmental impact but also the complaints procedure. I am grateful to the Minister for the way in which he replies in detail to complaints made by my constituents.

A complaint was made to me by a former RAF person about the alleged use of after burners by F111s flying over my constituency. When the Minister does reply in detail I shall be grateful to him. An independent complaints system which did not necessarily involve Ministry of Defence personnel would engender more public confidence and would be like the more independent systems that we have in other areas of public life. I hope that the Minister will take my complaints seriously because they are not coming just from a minority party in one area of Britain but are complaints which can be made by many hon. Members who represent rural constituencies.

8.33 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas). As he rightly said, defence must be placed in its political context. The political context about which most people are aware is the overwhelming conventional and nuclear predominance of the Soviet Union. The hon. Gentleman is a member of a minority party and is privileged because he is able to ignore national political opinion, but his colleagues in the other opposition parties will have more difficulty about that.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about low-flying aircraft. Like him, I represent a rural area and I assiduously represent my constituents' views and complaints about low flying to the Minister, who always replies most courteously, promptly and in great detail.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): If ineffectively.

Mr. Leigh: Not ineffectively, because as a result of representations it is clear that the RAF is made to sit up. I made representations about low flying over a certain primary school, and I hope that they have done some good. In general, while most of my constituents may have complaints about low flying and aircraft noise, they recognise that those things are the price of freedom and they are prepared generally to put up with them.

I want to deal with just one aspect of this debate—the air defence of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, he has had to leave the Chamber, but it was a privilege to listen to the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones). My generation owes his generation and yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a great debt and I do not need to repeat the obvious lessons of history about the role of the RAF in the defence of the United Kingdom. There are disturbi parallels between the situation that faces us today and th which existed in the 1930s.

First, Britain's air defence area is vast. It covers an ar of about 4 million square miles and is 1,000 miles fro north to south. I picked up an interesting artic containing the views of Air Marshall Sir Peter Harding. H speaks with considerable authority and he said:

"If the enemy is going to attack, he will have to attack sufficient numbers to swamp our defences."

He also said that more than 500 aircraft would be involv at the peak of the battle.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) a other hon. Members said that we face a quite frighteni conventional threat. I am not talking about nucle weapons. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear the ho Gentleman because he is mumbling.

Mr. Wilson: If there were to be any effective attack, would use ballistic missiles.

Mr. Leigh: Not necessarily. It is a great mistake assume that there would immediately be an escalation in nuclear weapons. That is why an essential part of o deterrent is our ability conventionally to deter. T maintenance of our fighter squadrons is very much a pa of that.

It has already been said that the assets of the Soviet armies include no fewer than 180 Bear and Bison bombe 145 Backfire bombers, 397 medium-range Blinder a Badger bombers and 450 shorter range Fencer stri aircraft. That is a quite frightening resource and one mu ask why the Soviet Union thinks it needs such a lar offensive capability. Against that capability we have ju nine fighter squadrons, and two of those are based in n constituency at RAF Binbrook. They are the Lightni squadrons. The Lightning first came into service in 196 so it is an old aircraft.

I shall say something about RAF Binbrook later in m speech because it is of special local concern. Before I de with that perhaps I could put a number of points to t Minister. He could reply to them later in the debate or letter. In September 1985 there was what I hope was successful exercise, Exercise Brave Defender. It was t largest exercise on home defence since the second wo war. I was made aware of this exercise, if I had not alrea known about it through the press and by being inform by the Minister, because a heavily armed platoon soldiers tramped through my back garden in Lincolnshi without any advance warning. As with aircraft noise accept that that is the price of freedom.

I am especially interested in the Soviet Spetnatz fi columnist threat. We read of disturbing rumours about t number of Soviet troops being trained in this capabili and in an area like Lincolnshire, with a number airfields, we take this threat seriously. Perhaps later in t debate, or in a letter to me, the Minister can give me update on how the relatively new concept of a grou defence area around our Royal Air Force airfields is bei developed. Perhaps he can tell us how he thinks t Territorials can cope with the almost insurmountab logistic problems that are posed and how we can possib hope to seal about 3,000 miles of coastline. I should li my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on poli primacy. I understand that it is envisaged that ordina police would play a major role, and I wonder wheth progress has been made.

I want to ask about pilot shortage, which was dealt with by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). As the Minister will know, I am a member of the Select Committee on Defence. On 21 May 1986 I asked a question of Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig. I said:

"I am told that the pressure on aircrew numbers is such that no less than 208 ground jobs are empty at the moment in order to ensure that sufficient pilots are kept in their cockpits. Is that right?"

At first he was not prepared to answer me. However, he then said:

"I can give you an order of figure. It would be about half that."

That is serious. In a written answer we were told that 58 officers had joined the premature voluntary retirement scheme. It has been written elsewhere that the RAF may be short of 200 pilots. Clearly, that is serious. There was an interesting article in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, to which reference has already been made. It suggested various reforms in recruitment policy. The House would be grateful for any comments that the Minister can make on that.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I do not know whether a tribute of any sort has been paid to Sir Humphrey Edwardes Jones. He was a flight lieutenant in 1936 and was responsible for vetting and giving the go-ahead to the Spitfire. He died only two or three days ago. His obituary is in *The Times* today, and in the context of what my hon. Friend has said this might be an appropriate moment to pay a tribute to him as a great man at a time when we really needed people of that calibre.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend makes a well-timed intervention and I am sure that the House will concur with his remarks.

Mr. Frank Cook: On the issue of aircrew and their availability, would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the opinions that I heard from our RAF aircrew in western Germany about the great attraction for them to follow the export of British produced airframes to the middle east to train Arab aircrew and to serve in Arab air forces? Is that not a drain in addition to the shortage that has already been mentioned?

Mr. Leigh: There have always been some RAF pilots who have helped middle east air forces. I was in Oman as a member of the Select Committee looking at operation Swift Sword and I was very impressed by the quality of the Omani troops and pilots and by the dedication and hard work of our own RAF personnel in the middle east. They are a credit to this nation.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my hon. Friend aware that between the wars the Royal Air Force policed the middle east and developed a relationship with the Arab countries, and that post-war the RAF has been involved in the middle east and has lent people on a regular basis to middle eastern countries?

Mr. Leigh: That is a good point. It is a matter of regret that our influence in the middle east is not wider than it is, and we all know the reasons why.

The main pilot drain will be not to the middle east, but to the United States. Recently I read that the United States would be recruiting about 6,000 pilots for its commercial airline operations in the next couple of years. That is an extraordinarily high figure.

I now want to deal with the Tornado. I was aware of the problems with the radar before they became public knowledge, because several Tornado pilots are my constituents in Lincolnshire. Without going into great detail, which would embarrass them and the Government, I must say that it is a serious issue. It has been mentioned several times, notably by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). We do not want another Nimrod fiasco. The sums of money involved are large and the Tornado is vital to our defence. It is in the interest of the Government to come clean at an early stage.

I want to mention briefly United Kingdom air defence ground environment. It is an important project. I believe that about £1 billion of public money is involved. The House would welcome further details of that. I can only speak from having read newspaper reports, but I understand that, unlike the radar on the Tornado, the scheme is a success story. It would be no bad thing to be told more about it.

The people of Lincolnshire have long been associated with the RAF. They are proud of their traditions with the RAF and are determined that the associations should continue. Therefore, I must deal with the future of RAF Binbrook, which is a historic and famous RAF base. It was founded as long ago as July 1940, 10 years before I was born. It has been the home in recent years of RAF Lightnings. Everybody in Lincolnshire knows that these planes are rapidly becoming obsolete, in spite of the fact that they are excellent and have given superb service. We all know that they have to be replaced.

The problem is similar to the difficulty that we face with Tornado radar. It is incumbent on Ministers to take local people into their confidence as early as possible on the possible closure of RAF Binbrook. Local people know that the Tornados are to be based at RAF Coningsby. They know that RAF Binbrook is rather too close to RAF Coningsby for operational efficiency. They know that there are difficulties with the so-called Humber gap, which has to be filled. They know, because I have taken pains to tell them, that the Ministry has been seeking earnestly for two years to find an alternative role for RAF Binbrook. I understand that the decisions are to be made soon, perhaps in February. At an early stage I hope that Ministers will take the Member representing RAF Binbrook and the local people—105 local people work at the base—into their confidence so that the future of the base can be explained. At the very least, local people would want to know that the base will be kept in some form, perhaps as a war reserve airfield.

The people in Lincolnshire are proud of their associations with the RAF and want them to continue. I shall end on a controversial note, by saying that I have no doubt that when the general election comes, whenever it may be, the people of "Bomber County" will not elect a Government who seem determined to throw away defences and freedoms that have been built up painstakingly over so many years.

8.48 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I feel honour-bound to begin by paying a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones). His contribution to the debate was offered in his usual pointed and pertinent style and with his customary reasoned and logical presentation. I commend that contribution to the House.

[Mr. Frank Cook]

There are many aspects of this subject to which one could refer. I want to confine my remarks to an area of examination around conventional weapons vis-a-vis nuclear weapons. The House may recall that during the debate last week on the Army I took the opportunity to contrast the need for adequate conventional equipment, which is sorely lacking in our Army units generally and in the central European sector especially, with the total inadequacy of nuclear preparation in terms of armament for conflict on that front. I took issue with the foolishness of claiming that the possession of nuclear weapons was a deterrent, when it is obvious that we cannot use them without condemning our own personnel to a premature death and condemning the countryside to a long-standing sickness of radiation. On that occasion, the Government spokesman failed to counter that thesis, so I offer it for comment later tonight.

I posed another question at that time: if we were making reference to deterrence, what were we trying to deter? Were we seeking to maintain a deterrence against Soviet invasion, or were we trying to maintain a deterrent against American withdrawal, as suggestions by certain American spokesmen might lead us to believe? I reminded the House that, regardless of the stated need from leaders of our forces in West Germany for conventional weapons, nuclear deterrence remains the order of the day, and that has not changed in the last week. Tonight, I ask the House to ponder the thesis that nuclear weapons are not only inadequate as a deterrent; they are also unnecessary. That thesis can be summed up as: "Who needs nuclear weapons when your adversary has a nuclear installation?" That is not a new thesis, but it might bear closer examination tonight.

A graphic reference to the type of scenario to which I refer was made as early as 1976 in the sixth report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, which was chaired by Sir Brian Flowers. On page 123, paragraph 314, it is stated:

"We have given some thought to the possible effects of war so far as nuclear installations are concerned; these installations, providing vital energy supplies, would be prime targets. In a nuclear war the effects of attack on nuclear installations would be one part of a general catastrophe, but an attack with conventional weapons leading to the release of radioactivity would produce some of the effects of nuclear weapons. The quantities of fission products that could be released are vast and they would not be carried up into the stratosphere."

I pose the question again: "Who needs nuclear weapons when your adversary has nuclear installations?"

The Royal Commission report continued:

"The effects of war, even of 'conventional' war, are inevitably horrifying, but if these effects could be magnified by attack on nuclear installations, then this is a major factor to consider when deciding whether, or to what extent, to use nuclear power."

That is very wise counsel.

"The unique aspect of nuclear installations is that the effects of the radioactive contamination that could be caused are so long lasting. If nuclear power could have been developed earlier, and had it been in widespread use at the time of the last war, it is likely that some areas of central Europe would still be uninhabitable because of ground contamination by caesium."

That is the considered view of the Royal Commission. As a result of reading that, certain questions were posed to the Government as early as October 1985. I want the House to know of these inquiries and to know of response. The questions were phrased in the foll form:

"Would there be a catastrophic release of radioa from a nuclear power station if: *(a)* it suffered a dir from one or more conventional bombs; *(b)* it suffered miss from a conventional weapon; *(c)* it suffered a dir from a weapon such as a bazooka style rocket launche an aircraft crashed onto the station?"

That was the nature of the inquiry. The reply, da November 1985, from the hon. Member for Bristol (Mr. Waldegrave), at that time a junior Enviro Minister, was:

"I think I can do no better than to let you ha attached copy of his letter, which explains that nuclear stations are built to withstand the sort of accident or you envisage."

Two days before that, I received a letter dat November 1985 from the hon. Member for Edd (Mr. Goodlad), at that time an Under-Secretary o for Energy, who stated:

"In particular they aim to prevent release of radioa in the worst credible accident; . . . nuclear power stati built in such a way that they would withstand a large of aircraft crashes and direct hits from conventional r without any release of radioactivity at all."

Those letters may be reassuring to my grandchild children a little older than that, but can we believe t Royal Air Force — that had the skill, tenacit courage to fly down the main streets of occupied co and lob bombs through the doors of G headquarters; that had the piloting expertise to d bombs on German prisons so as to breach the w liberate prisoners of war incarcerated there; that d bombs on the Möhne and Oder dams to such deva effect—or other air forces cannot penetrate the in of nuclear installations? Am I to accept, without qu two ministerial responses that are so clearly fatuo

So many of the existing 120 nuclear installati western Europe are clearly unhardened targets. So of them, we already know, do not even have a f secondary containment to guard against bluebott alone bazookas. Is not such blind disregard simply and somewhat irresponsible diversion from a real weakness within our own resource? Is not the vali my further arguments in the Army debate ever obvious?

If we need nuclear deterrence at all, does n potential enemy, whichever nation that enemy tu to be, already have our nuclear deterrence possession? Is not our commitment to the nuclear w programme, as I said on that occasion, simply a m ensuring the consignment of even more billions British taxpayers' earnings to the bottomless bun the American armsmongers so that they can g assure us, as they do, more bang for a buck?

Is it not true that the only sensible policy in eco moral, employment and tactical terms, and, in terms of the balance of payments, is the adoption policy enunciated by the Labour party?

8.59 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I wan a few words about helicopters. I may tend to stra the narrow confines of the debate, but I think th know well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is wit Ministry of Defence a group of people who don sor

which they call purple. That means that they represent the all-arms view of defence strategy. My speech will be something of a purple speech.

During the first world war, the balance of advantage initially, and almost to the end, was with the forces of defence. Mobility was impossible until the development of the tank. The tank, which had protection and mobility with it, changed the course of the end of that war. The reign of the machine gun was replaced with the reign of armour. That sea change happened then, as it has happened many times in history before, where one type of weapon system has predominated for a long time until it has been replaced with another. Other examples, as well as tanks and machine guns, are the English archer and gunpowder.

What I shall say now is intended to be provocative; thought-provoking rather than didactic. I do not want to dictate to anybody. It is a thesis, not a programme. I believe that we have reached another of those turning points. The age of the tank in many circumstances is virtually over. In today's warfare, the tank is the most expensive and the heaviest high-tech coffin that has ever been invented. We are now reaching the age of the battlefield helicopter with its two main roles. It has a role in attack, in anti-tank attack, and as a helicopter gunship. It also has an assault role as a means of moving quickly, to wherever the threat is greatest, reinforcements of men and supplies, and, in particular, anti-tank missiles.

The classical use of armour was in the role of the blitzkrieg—the punch: knock a hole through the enemy lines. In the previous war, particularly on the Russian front, the tank, in blitzkrieg attack, with its strength, protection and mobility, was a powerful instrument indeed. But now that protection, size and power are its signature and that signature gives its position away on modern radar and surveillance techniques.

The relative mobility of the tank has been replaced, now that we have more air mobility, with relative immobility. If an enemy were intent upon a major tank attack—a blitzkrieg—and got all its tanks together to try to force a punch through, concentrated, those tanks would be seen from a great distance by surveillance. They would be seen and could be engaged by armed helicopters from a distance well beyond the range of the tank. The tank would not know that the helicopters were there. As the tanks concentrated—and that would take time—all that movement would be "visible". The helicopters could concentrate much more quickly. A helicopter, with its missile, could take out tank after tank after tank without the tanks being able to do anything about the helicopter whatever.

Of course, there is the other role of the tank—the role of the tank in defence—holding ground. If a tank is dug in, it is a very good defence against armour. The infantry dug in in the past was never such a good defence against armour. The Energa grenades were pretty well suicidal. The Wombat and the Mobat, with their telltale back blast, were almost as dangerous to the user as to the tank they were taking on. But new infantry missiles score every time. As techniques develop, they will, with even more certainty, be able to take out enemy tank as effectively as with direct tank fire. But, as I have said before, the helicopter standing further back will be an even more formidable weapon than the tank.

That is a defence against tank attack. Times and circumstances change, with the likelihood in the future of many more airborne attacks. A tank has to be in the right defensive position. If it is not in the right position, how is it going to get there? The relative mobility of the tank in previous military circumstances has been lost. The battlefield is covered by obstacles. The tank cannot move because of those obstacles. It cannot move across rivers or through thick woods. It moves relatively slowly. A helicopter flies across woods and rivers and is much more mobile, faster and more effective.

It is useful when considering such changes to ask what other forces have done. The Americans in Germany, in their corps, have four times as many support helicopters as we have. The Russians have as many if not more helicopters than the Americans and are developing a formidable array of attack helicopters. In 1982, there was a confrontation in the Beka'a valley between the Syrians and the Israelis. Looking at the relative rate of attrition between helicopter and tank in that confrontation, the Israelis took out 30 tanks for every helicopter lost, and when the Syrians had the helicopters they took out 15 tanks for every helicopter lost. They are overwhelming figures.

When the age of the tank commenced, the premier strategist was an Englishman, Liddell Hart. Yet the technique for using tanks was developed first not by the British but by the Germans. The reason for that was the institutional nature of the German armed forces, being totally different from ours. The Germans had a general staff that was not bogged down with factional lobbies but was able to take an overall view and develop a grand strategy where that strategy was needed. In the United Kingdom there was reluctance to pursue the necessary changes because of the bastard marriage between bad tradition and vested interest lobbies. I believe—and if my informants are right, it is so—that the same problems are appearing today. There is inflexibility of inter-Service budgets, loyalty to arm, the vested interest, including the promotion structure of brother officers in similar regiments.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marlow: I will not, because there is a shortage of time and my hon. Friend wants to follow me.

Those problems block progress of tactical development and equipment ordering programmes. Cavalry generals promote cavalry generals. Cavaliers love their tanks as they used to love their horses. It is time that we did away with the "cavalry" and all its paraphernalia.

War was conducted by a combination of amateur villeins and yeoman on foot and gentlemen on horseback. It may then have been proper to lend a bit of tone to what might have been otherwise a vulgar brawl. We now live in an age of professionals. Equestrianism is no longer useful as a military skill. Sums spent on military equipment are scarce, and necessarily so. It is vital and essential that we spend it on the right equipment. We need more helicopters and fewer tanks. We always make the mistake of preparing for the last war. This time we must prepare for the next.

We learned lessons in the Falklands about our vessels and the way they were equipped. Elementary mistakes had been made, which we realised as soon as the hot war was upon us, but it was the peacetime structure—vested interests, the lobby, the nature of the Ministry of Defence—which provided those vessels in that conformation. Let us not make the same mistake in ordering military

[Mr. Marlow]

equipment in the future. We should have more helicopters. Where are we going to get them? We have, in Westland, our helicopter industry. We all know that Westland is faced with an order gap. Not only do we need Westland to build our helicopters for the future, we need it to maintain the helicopters we have at the moment. We need Westland to keep together its technicians and design team.

I ask the Minister to give some good news soon about providing a work load for this very important task of our defence industry. When we have the helicopters I am sure the Minister will put in the right order for the necessary equipment. The helicopters are deployed. Who is going to control them? At the moment, the heavier helicopters in Germany are run, maintained, with training programmes and everything else, by the Air Force. We have had eloquent arguments from this side of the House that they should be run by the Army. Conservative Members have argued eloquently for this and given the example of the Royal Navy, which controls its own helicopters. Use of helicopters by the Royal Navy has no peer in the world.

Similarly, a formation commander in the Army wants to have helicopters under his command and not need to borrow them. He wants to have his helicopters to develop his strategies, take his risks and integrate his forces in his formation and to make the necessary decisions to develop future strategy.

I add to my hon. Friend's plea that the military helicopters in the armed services used in BAOR-type formations should come under the command and control and have the uniform of the Army rather than of the Royal Air Force. Of course there will be co-operation, and men from one Service will go on another Service's courses, but the time has come to introduce this change.

9.10 pm

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): I know that hon. Members want to hear the concluding speeches shortly, so, in the brief time available, I shall concentrate on one major subject. Before doing so, I should like to express my appreciation, as have other hon. Members, of the tremendous performance of the Royal Air Force in the Oman exercises. It was a remarkable example of the skills used in operating the Tornados. In that out-of-area exercise we saw five to seven mid-air refuelling operations with Tornados flying all over Oman. The turnaround time was amazingly fast. The operation reflected well on not only the pilots and their training but the aircraft, which demonstrated that they were high in the world league table.

The subject that I wish to raise follows a question asked by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). I should like to persuade my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to respond to my comments on satellites. I do not intend to talk about the so-called "spy" satellites, partly out of deference to the ruling which Mr. Speaker made earlier, and partly because the relationship between the article in the *New Statesman* and the current state of play with my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is not entirely known to me. I hope that my remarks will help to keep in perspective what some of us see as some of the more glaring errors in the reports that we have read so far.

We are all aware that there was a major hole in our defence capability when we did not have a Skynet capability. During the Falklands campaign fortunate that the Americans took the view th that we had co-operation. Had such co-operati available, we would have been without a crucia That is why the questions that have been pose launching of Skynet are so important.

I should declare my interest as a parliamen to the space and communications division Aerospace. I welcome the splendid news Aerospace and Marconi are to extend their lin to NATO satellites. This development is evi high technological capability in this count especially important illustration of our defenc in that forward programme.

There are three satellites in Skynet—4A, I understand that the first was to be laun shuttle. Obviously, that programme has be because of the problems with shuttle launch c satellite's design was not compatible with Ar shuttle. There is a lesson to be learnt from th —it is unwise to put all our eggs into one b of us who argued in favour of modifications t either launch capability would have been appr been proved, regrettably, to be correct. W satisfaction in pointing that out.

The first of Skynet is due to be launched That will inevitably mean that the second sate look to Ariane for its launch. That would pr also to the third satellite.

Those three satellites are part of a whole c They are designed to provide communicati military purposes. It is clear to anyone who three satellites that their basis is interrelate one, especially, is now significant because of mark relating to the shuttle launch that applied to the first. In that context argumen existence of a third Skynet can most clearly be

What has now been announced on the NA is a major breakthrough for British industry, constituents take particular pleasure. Al Portsmouth will see some direct work in Ma at Stevenage will see an extension of the lin £170 million contract which will provide a value added work for sub-contractors thr country. That is all good news. It is part Kingdom defence satellite capability which b the future. I hope that when my hon. Friend replies he will give us a little more informatio indications of likely dates of the shuttle lau

I shall touch briefly on the so-called Briti Suggestions have been made that, because delay, the possibility of a British astronaut our launch activity has in some way been would be sorry if that were the case. I h Minister can confirm tonight that such is not that matter is still under consideration, an when we see—as we hope we shall—the s confirmed once again, there will be an oppor resumption of the original training program to be exercised for Squadron Leader Anything that the Minister will say on th welcome.

At present we envisage some difficulties o of a British astronaut for the NATO satellit clearer about launch capability. But I am a that, again, we should not be ruled out on

because we see largely British built satellites within NATO by definition the astronaut must come from some other country. I do not wish to make too much of what was perhaps meant in a lighthearted way by the distinguished air vice-marshal, who suggested that "even a Turk" might be applicable, but NATO must keep a broad and open view. If, by that time, British astronauts have direct payload experience—as is made possible through Skynet—let us try to ensure that they are available and the most obviously qualified candidates for the NATO satellite.

Within those requests to the Minister I have tried to encompass briefly what seemed to be some facets of a most important development for British industry in the widest context. Many hon. Members believe that the spin-off from military to commercial satellite construction has great value. It is part of a development that I hope will continue over the months that lie ahead. It is in that regard that many of the reports which are now being bandied about on spy satellites should be viewed. Those are the matters that really concern us tonight. They put into perhaps the widest possible context some of the more sensationalist and, I believe, schoolboy howler sort of reports that we have seen before us today.

9.19 pm

Mr. McNamara: Hon. Members have addressed several questions to me, so I shall start by dealing with them and go on to the philosophical matters behind the debate.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) asked how our non-nuclear policy would enable our forces to sink deep-running Soviet submarines. We have had this out in the past and I shall give an answer from Noel Gaylor, a United States admiral. He said:

"The most concrete objection is that any initial use of nuclear weapons at sea would be very much to the disadvantage of the Allies, because we are the outfit with the big ships and we are the outfit largely dependent on service ships to keep the seas open. The differential advantage we might get from going after a submarine with a nuclear depth bomb is just not worth it. In addition it has the interesting characteristic that if you blow one beneath the surface of the sea, you will ring the ocean acoustically for several hours and lose the capability to track anybody. As a tactic that is soft-headed, deeply obnoxious—and militarily futile."

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Mr. McNamara: With great respect, I have little time. In other words, the American admiral is saying that faced with a shoal of nuclear submarines, if we hit the first one, the others would come through because the sensors would not be working.

Mr. Bill Walker: Conventional forces cannot sink them.

Mr. McNamara: Why, then, are we wasting so much money on Spearfish and Sting Ray which are specifically designed for that purpose? That is what we have been told by both Marconi and the Government.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) raised several questions. Because the Trident project is spread over 20 years, the Government argue that the average proportion of defence resources that it takes is limited, and that between 1980-81 and 1999-2000 it will take only 2·9 per cent. of the total defence budget. However, that statement is misleading, because Trident spending will not be spread evenly over the 20 year procurement period. Seventy-eight per cent. of the total spending, or £7·3 billion, is due in the decade from 1986. In that period Trident will account for 4·5 per cent. of total defence spending, 10·4 per cent. of total equipment spending and 17·2 per cent. of new equipment spending.

Therefore, using Ministry of Defence figures, we can calculate that total defence spending, excluding Trident, will fall by about 11 per cent. in real terms between 1984-85 and 1989-1990, which will return conventional defence spending to its 1982-83 level. Thus total equipment spending, again excluding Trident, will fall by about 23 per cent. in real terms in the five years from 1984-85 to 1989-90, which means that conventional equipment spending will return to about its 1980-81 level. The new equipment spending, again excluding Trident, will fall by about 30 per cent. in real terms between 1984-85 and 1989-90 and by that year the level of real spending on conventional new equipment will be lower than in any year since 1979-80.

With the unit costs of all new weapons rising, many difficult decisions must be made. In recent years, by keeping its head firmly below the parapet, the RAF has been able to maintain, and indeed secure greater increases in, equipment growth. As a result it could be argued that to avoid cuts in the surface fleet or BAOR the RAF should be cut. That immediately brings into question the future of the European fighter aircraft programme, on which the Government have said that they have no firm contractual commitment and that the total cost could be £9 billion. If that programme were delayed or cancelled or the size of the British order, estimated at 250 planes, reduced, it would enable large savings to be made in the RAF's budget in the early 1990s.

There is no firm budget commitment or undertaking on the EFA. Therefore, we are entitled to say, knowing how the Government will write in White Papers after the general election—whatever the Government—that some crucial decisions must be taken and the EFA programme could well be at risk. I say to the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, if the Conservatives win the general election and keep Trident, there is a real chance of losing the EFA programme. I must remind the hon. Gentleman's constituents who work in the defence industry that their jobs are not sacrosanct. The royal ordnance factories, the royal dockyards and British Aerospace and its factories thought that they were safe. There is no reason why Bristol workers nor any person employed in conventional industry should feel that their jobs are safe under this Government.

There have been some strange statements about Labour party policy and the Government's attitude to it. On the suggestion that we would leave 1st Corps unprotected, I shall ask the questions that we sought to ask in last week's debate; they are fundamental to that attitude and we have not yet received answers to them.

What nuclear weapons or facilities are under the control of 1st Corps, British Army of the Rhine and can be used unilaterally? The answer is none. Not one weapon can be used without the say-so of the United States. The Russian hordes can come over and run across all our men, seize everything, and threaten to come up Whitehall, and we will not be able to use those weapons without American consent. It is not us, but our American allies, who are reducing the strength of BAOR. If Conservative Members had the courage, they would admit that. Instead, they go on the myth that we have a nuclear capability which

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BAOR can use without the say-so of the Americans. We cannot therefore go along with the Government's thinking.

Although we have some fine new weapons for the RAF such as Tornado — the Government talk a great deal about what they are doing—we should consider the cost of spending so much on nuclear weaponry. We have 1951 Shackletons, 1956 Jet Provosts, 1958 Buccaneers, 1955 Victors, 1963 Wessexes, 1971 Pumas, 1967 Harrier GR3s, 1967 Phantoms, 1959 Lightnings, 1968 Nimrods and 1951 Canberras. That is a collection for the air museum and it is the cost of spending so much on nuclear weapons.

It is disgraceful to suggest that the Labour party's policy is neutralist. It is not. I welcome the Secretary of State, who is laughing, to the debate. With the resolution in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament which the Labour party conference accepted by a two thirds majority on a card vote, which means that it becomes party policy, was a resolution in favour of continued membership of NATO.

Sir Antony Buck *rose——*

Mr. McNamara: With the greatest respect to the hon. and learned Gentleman, I shall not give way. I have given up 10 minutes and have promised not to take too much time so that the Minister can get in a lot more information.

There seems to be an idea that the Labour party's suggestion that we should look again at the concepts and strategies of NATO is strange. Do the British people have a choice? We are saying that they do. They can go along with nuclear policy, which will weaken our conventional forces and lower the nuclear threshold, or they can strengthen our conventional forces so that we can play our proper role in NATO, as we are best able to do.

The idea is not peculiar to the Labour party—it has occurred to Caspar Weinberger who said at the National Press Club:

"Most of the concepts that shape our thinking about what forces we need and how they would be used were formulated in the 1950s and early 1960s . . . The world has changed so profoundly since the 1950s and 1960s when most strategic ideas were formulated that many of these concepts are now obsolete."

I do not claim Caspar Weinberger as a sudden convert to unilateralism, but I do claim that he sees the intellectual choice and military problems which face NATO in the 1990s and the 21st century.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was at the core of the creation of many of these policies in the early 1960s when he was Secretary of State for Defence. He said:

"There is now a growing feeling among military experts that NATO must look in a different direction—towards a non-provocative strategy of conventional deterrence which could protect NATO territory without using nuclear weapons if deterrence should fail. We in the Labour Party share this feeling."

Are we wrong to say to our allies, "Stop. How far do you expect us to go along this road?" How can we afford the money, the forces, the treasure and the expertise to go along that road? It would be far better to draw back and to try to consider the consequences of that decision. It would be far better to stop, and at least to think about it. That is the Labour party policy. We are asking our NATO allies to sit down and consider whether this policy is the proper one.

After Reykjavik, George Shultz said:

"We may be on the verge of important approach to the role of nuclear weapons in

In November 1986 he went on to say:

"It may be that we have arrived at a true The nuclear age cannot be undone or abo permanent reality but we can glimpse now, fo a world freed from the incessant and pervasive devastation . . . a nuclear defence strategy th threat of escalation to the strategic nuclear co an unwelcome solution to ensuring our natio George Shultz was discussing the United S security. That decision is based on that na rather than our own or European national is in Europe that the first line of the battle

Conservative Members may criticise us, they will continue to do so—but they sho behave as military dinosaurs. They should the possibilities and the principles upon w their policies. I can understand if Conserv come to a different conclusion from o arrived at after honest and rigorou examination—but they should not doubt honesty of our interpretation. The momen they are saying that half the population of not want Trident, are dishonest. Are they to the country and say to half of the people, of you are too thick and too dishonest to all about"? That patronising attitude electorate is absolutely disgusting.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Binbrook in his constituency, said that the an overwhelming preponderance of co nuclear forces. That is not true. If it was that any of us would be here today. International Institute of Strategic Studies the military balance in 1986-87:

"The overall conventional balance contin make military aggression a highly risky und With regard to conventional capability Cas said:

"As this report illustrates, contrary to som does not suffer an unmanageable initial weak conventional combat power."

So much for the assessment that the R many tanks that they could come over in o wipe us all out. We in turn have our anti-t bean count does not work.

General Bernard Rogers said:

"The advantage is with the defender and t pact) will give us credit for being strong ourselves credit for."

Conservative Members who attack our the Americans will go home if we follow The Americans will go home only if they longer in their national interest to be he Americans have bases here or not they wi they have reached that conclusion. If considered such bases to be in their natio Government, they would be wrong no decision. Caspar Weinberger said:

"US forces are maintained in Europe di of US political and military interests — n charity towards our allies."

The Minister who opened the debat understand what Labour party policy Minster spreads what, in other circumst termed a big lie, that we are neutralists, i Labour party is committed to the defenc

by land sea and air. That commitment is greater than the commitment of the Government who are willing to risk everything on the nuclear gamble. They are prepared to allow our conventional forces to be run down to such an extent that in the end the only way we can defend ourselves will be to use a very low nuclear threshold. That will be the consequence of the hon. Gentleman's policy.

Let no Conservative Member doubt Labour's commitment to the defence of Europe and the positive role it will seek to play within NATO. Let no one doubt Labour's determination to maintain a proper contribution towards the collective and nuclear defence of the country. Far from being a contradiction, our policy of a determined and strong membership of NATO, unilateral nuclear disarmament and no nuclear bases in the United Kingdom, is the direction in which we think that NATO will move. That is the direction in which we will seek with increasing acceleration to draw our NATO allies on both sides of the continent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) has made perhaps his last speech in an RAF debate. He was proud to defend his country. If he were fighting the next election, he would be equally proud to go to the hustings on such a policy.

9.36 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): This has been a wide-ranging and serious debate and I shall try to answer as many as possible of the questions that have been raised. My officials advise me that well over 100 questions have been asked. My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) has probably accounted for 25 per cent. of them. In regard to those questions that I cannot answer because of shortage of time, I shall read the debate carefully, as will my colleagues and we will write to all Members, on both sides of the House, who have raised questions and try to answer them as fully as possible.

Before attempting to answer some of the questions, may I devote a short time to answering one point referred to by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) in his opening and closing speeches about the resources available to the Royal Air Force. When he was opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement described the range of roles and activities undertaken by the Royal Air Force. They are essential to the effective defence of the United Kingdom and to this country making a worthwhile contribution to the NATO Alliance. This Government have, over their period in office, substantially increased the resources devoted to this end.

The defence budget is substantially larger in real terms than when we entered office, and the proportion of that budget spent on equipment has grown from 39 to 45 per cent. since 1979. The RAF's share of that budget is some 30 per cent. in the current year. In real terms the RAF has benefited greatly from this Government's policies. Excluding Falklands costs, expenditure on the RAF in 1986-87 will amount to £5·4 billion, which represents an increase in real terms, using Ministry of Defence cost deflators and not the retail price index deflator, of 21 per cent. since 1978-79. The Government need no lectures from the Opposition about strengthening conventional forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) asked about noise compensation. It might be helpful if I remind the House briefly of the policies recently produced by the Government to deal with this important problem. We have introduced a noise compensation scheme to alleviate the nuisance military aircraft cause in the vicinity of military airfields. Depending on the location of the house affected, the compensation that is paid by the Ministry of Defence in these circumstances may take one of three forms.

First, a grant to cover the cost of acoustic secondary double glazing is paid when noise levels are at least 70 decibels over a 12-hour period, and in addition special account is taken of night flying. Secondly, we offer to purchase where dwellings are subject to exceptionally high noise levels; for instance, where properties are subject to 83 decibels or more over a 12-hour period. Finally, compensation for the depreciation of property value is offered. The district valuer of the Inland Revenue assesses this compensation to ensure that the sum of money paid is independently assessed. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton mentioned in particular the noise survey at RAF Cottesmore. I am hoping to have the report in February and to consider extending the scheme in a few months time.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) asked about Hawks and potential sales to Venezuela. I understand that British Aerospace signed a contract to supply Hawks to Venezuela in 1982. The Venezuelans did not proceed, but both the Ministry of Defence and British Aerospace remain hopeful that they will decide to proceed with the purchase.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North raised a number of points, and I shall try to deal with the major ones. In one point he was joined by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). They all referred to the loss of pilots in particular, but officers in general, from the Royal Air Force through what is called premature retirement. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said that he detected a lack of urgency in the Ministry of Defence in dealing with this problem, but that is not true. I shall briefly explain how we are tackling this problem with great vigour.

It might be helpful if I corrected the impression that the hon. Gentleman gave that this problem is getting worse. Far from it. The latest statistics are good news. I shall deal first with all officers and then with pilots in particular. For the 12 months ended 31 December 1985, the number of officer exits as a percentage of the total trained officer strength was 2·7 per cent., but in the most recent 12 months, in the year ended 31 December 1986, that percentage has fallen to 2·3 per cent. I am glad that there has been that reduction for all officers, and it is true also of pilots. In the year ended 31 December 1985 the number of pilot exits as a percentage of trained pilot strength was 2·1 per cent., and for the most recent 12 months, ending 31 December 1986, that percentage had fallen to 1·9 per cent. That is good news about pilot exits.

We all understand the reasons for these exits and in previous debates, the hon. Member for Woolwich has alluded to some of the factors. The push factors are the turbulance of service life, and this is not just a feature of RAF life but applies to all three services. There are some

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criticisms of conditions of service, particularly in the RAF. The gratuity that is paid to pilots at the eight-year point when, if they are on 12-year commissions they have the right to leave, creates distortions. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) referred to some of the pull factors, the main one being the attractions of the airlines and British Airways in particular.

What are we doing about the problem of exits, which I hope I have shown is a little less severe than it was a few years ago? We have taken three measures. First, as regards turbulence, we are extending the tours of RAF pilots and officers. That should give a greater stability to family life. Secondly, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said, we have appointed a two-star officer to study the terms and conditions of service of RAF officers, and in particular to see whether we can learn any lessons and identify problems. Finally, we are looking at some of the allowances, such as those that relate to the movement of officers and men, and at some of the separation allowances.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend also pay tribute to the maintenance depots, such as that at Stortford, and to the fact that the maintenance of the RAF is as important as the retention of officers, pilots and others?

Mr. Freeman: I gladly pay that tribute. Unfortunately, the issue has not been raised in the debate. I hope that we can return to the important issue of maintenance.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North also raised the matter of the Tucano. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North and the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) also alluded to this. I am sorry that I was not in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Eccles spoke. I pay tribute to him. As I understand it, he is one of the last hon. Members who fought in the second world war. We shall miss his contributions.

My hon. Friends will be aware that the first Tucano rolled off the production line a couple of days ago. Boscombe Down will receive two aircraft for trials and evaluation in a few months. The company predicts that two aircraft a month will be delivered to the RAF, starting in May. Training of the first Tucano squadron is due to begin in the summer of 1988. Delivery of the first aircraft to the Royal Air Force will be a few months later than originally planned, but we hope to recover some of this lost time later in the programme.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North asked also about AWACS. He asked whether six Boeing aircraft would be enough. Obviously in reaching any major procurement decision, affordability is a major consideration. Six of the E3As can be accommodated within the available defence budget provision, whereas eight will pose more difficulties. A decision on whether to exercise the option on the further two aircraft will be taken in the light of the outcome of the annual recosting of the defence programme on which the Department is currently engaged.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North asked about the Foxhunter fire radar for the Tornado. My hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble and for Gainsborough and Horncastle also asked about this matter. Concern has been expressed by the Ministry to GEC Avionics about slippage in the programme. The company has agreed to aim for accelerated production. We are also discussing with GEC the resolve the problems associated with th and demonstrate acceptable perform future. Our aim will be a mutually a contract.

The hon. Member for Kingston up asked about the GR5. The size of the is under consideration. Orders for cer were placed last year, and a decision o will be made in the next couple of mo

The hon. Gentleman and my hon. for South Ribble also asked abou aircraft programme. It is our intenti Ministry of Defence funding of the e programme should be as part of the programme on an international basi awaiting proposals from industry on used in this context.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Does my hon. that pressure needs to come from Ministers within the four-nation consc the other three countries are prepared has a vital role to play in the Eurofighter?

Mr. Freeman: The *Official Report* the concern expressed by my hon. Fr one of the procurement Ministers has he said, not only in his intervention,

My hon. Friend the Member for (Mr. Wiggin) spoke generally abou helicopters — he was joined by m Member for Northampton, North specifically about the control of supp is the argument about whether co helicopters should pass, in part, from to the Army.

My hon. Friend the Member for referred to the 1985 reorganisation Defence, whereby operational req sidered centrally. He talked about pu at the Ministry of Defence. This rec any risk of capabilities which cross S being given their rightful priority. I my experience in the Ministry of Defe case. Nevertheless, the Government matter and are bearing very much Committee's views as expressed in i I have just said was reiterated by my Secretary of State when he set o position not only in the debate on Government's response to the third the Select Committee.

The hon. Member for Woolw condition of married quarters and that 70 per cent. of them are below This is a very important issue importance to it not, only when I planning the allocation of Ministry In recent years the Government increasing resources to improving th Service men. A comprehensive undertaken to modernise the acco service men, at a cost of over £170 years. We have also been devoting

modernising the RAF's married quarters estate. We plan to spend £16 million on improving married quarters in this financial year, with a planned investment of the same order in each of the following 10 years.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Government's attitude to defence against short-range ballistic missiles. We shall study *Hansard* with great interest, because the hon. Gentleman made detailed contribution to the debate. He is right to draw attention to this threat. It has to be taken very seriously. The existence of the threat is an illustration of the range and diversity of the dangers against which we have to structure our defences, but the nature of the appropriate response is difficult and complex. There is a range of possibilities. The hon. Gentleman referred to many of the considerations that have to be borne in mind. The NATO Alliance—and undoubtedly the hon. Gentleman's own alliance—is considering this issue carefully, and the United Kingdom is naturally playing its full part in that consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble raised what seemed to be well over a quarter of the outstanding questions that I have yet to deal with. I shall deal now with three of the most important ones and will certainly respond to the others. The first related to ASTOVL. The United Kingdom signed a memorandum of understanding last year to exchange information on national studies on development technologies, including propulsion systems and advanced flight control avionics. The ASTOVL aircraft is seen to be a potential replacement for the Sea Harrier, the Harrier GR5 and the Tornado GR1, but we are at an early stage in our studies and cannot commit ourselves to any particular system.

My hon. Friend also asked about the NATO IFF. This is a very complex area, as he suggested, and it is not surprising that discussions within NATO have proved to be protracted. The IFF system, to be carried on ships, aircraft and ground weapons systems, is currently under project definition. I shall write to my hon. Friend in greater detail on the matter.

My hon. Friend also asked about the consequences of the diversion of the Tornado aircraft to the Saudis, and asked for an assurance, which I shall now give him, that this will not prejudice the Royal Air Force in terms of the ultimate number of aircraft that it will receive or, indeed, the cost. All the replacements for the RAF's programme will be received by the early 1990s.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) asked about the United Kingdom mobile force in the context of the transportation of that force to the central front, or at least on the northern part of the central front and the northern flank. The Government are committed to making efforts to improve output from the considerable resources that we devote to defence. In this context we are discussing within NATO whether, in its present role, the United Kingdom mobile force represents the most effective use of those resources. The financial implications of any change in current deployment plans depend on the outcome of the confidential discussions that are under way in NATO, the outcome of which cannot yet be predicted.

As for the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), I pay tribute to and acknowledge the fact that his commission in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve has been extended to the age of 60, which is many years off. We thank and congratulate him on his many years of valuable service to the Royal Air Force. He has vast experience and has raised a number of detailed questions on gliding schools, which are m by volunteers. I welcome the opportunity to pay trib the work of these men. They do a tremendous encouraging the enthusiastic youngsters who go to to learn to fly. The RAF give all the support that to the gliding schools and we are aiming to expand activities to whatever extent this can sensibly be don hon. Friend referred to a number of specific pro about which I shall write to him in due course.

My hon. Friend also referred to air cadets, a that is dear to my heart because in my own consti of Kettering there is an excellent contingent of t Training Corps. As my hon. Friend knows, the derives a proportion of its recruits from the ATC. I the number of ex-ATC cadets expressed as a percent the total RAF intake was: officers, 33 per cent., airm per cent., and apprentices 41 per cent. It is clea entrants to the service with an ATC background decided initial advantage in training over those wit and wastage is likely to be less.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North (Mr. Stern) has important constituency interests in Royce and British Aerospace. He expressed clearly House his aspirations for the two engines, the RB19 the EJ200. His concerns are noted, and I know th hon. Friend in defence procurement listened t contribution with special care.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conw Thomas) explained that he had to leave the House the conclusion of the debate. He spoke about low aircraft, as did my hon. Friend the Member for T North. It is a problem, but it is not getting worse judged by the number of complaints from the publ from hon. Members, and also in terms of the flying and the number of missions flown. Nevertheless, i important problem and, as my hon. Friend the M for Tayside, North knows, we have changed the s My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mar Wiggin) will be familiar with this problem, beca dealt with these issues with great care and diligence he was at the Ministry of Defence. We changed the about 10 years ago from the system that the Germa have.

I must take issue with the hon. Memb Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, because he is wrong. Federal Republic of Germany there are complain the system, which confines all low flying to designated areas, concentrates the problem. Our sy better and we have no intention of changing it. I kno the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy wil the record. In the past I have offered to meet him to the problems of low flying in Wales and I repeat tha

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborou Horncastle asked about Binbrook. The future of Binbrook is being reviewed in the Ministry of Defen final recommendations have been made and a announcement will be made as soon as possible. I g hon. Friend the undertaking that when we r conclusion I will consult him and convey our concl to him on the earliest possible occasion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Ma asked about Skynet. The delay to the United States programme which followed the tragic Challenger ac last year necessitated a review of the planned arrangements for the three Skynet satellites 4A, 4B a As a result of this review it was decided to switch Sky

[Mr. Freeman]

from a Shuttle to an Ariane launch in order to meet as early as possible the urgent military requirements for improved satellite communications.

It is also planned to launch Skynet 4C on Ariane. Although the subsequent failure of an Ariane rocket on 31 May has led to delays in that programme, there has been no further revision of the basic launch strategy for the Skynet 4 satellites. Skynet 4B will be the first of the three satellites to be launched in May 1988. Skynet 4A is still planned for launch by the shuttle, but the most recent date offered by NASA is July 1990. As a consequence of the delay in the shuttle programme, the United Kingdom payload specialists—that means the people who go in it—have returned to normal service duties for the time being. It is intended that when circumstances permit selected members of the team will be recalled when appropriate for refreshment training to enable a United Kingdom payload specialist to fly on the shuttle mission during which Skynet 4A is launched.

Perhaps it is appropriate for me to concentrate my closing remarks on the contribution made by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). I shall then have done justice to all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. He argued that nuclear weapons are unnecessary. The Government's policy is quite clear. It is that an effective defence policy needs conventional and nuclear weapons. These are the weapons possessed by the forces of the Warsaw pact and it is important to duplicate them for our forces. The Royal Air Force needs a nuclear capacity. I put to the hon. Gentleman a question that was not answered in the debate on the Army. If the RAF loses its nuclear capability, will the risk of aggression by Soviet pact forces be more, or less?

Mr. McNamara *rose*——

Mr. Freeman: It was a rhetorical question, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. Conservative Members believe that there will be a greater risk from the strategy of the hon. Member for Stockton, North. Labour party policy is dangerous and will be rejected decisively by the electorate.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Language Training (Wolverhampton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of language teaching at Colton Hills school at Penn in my constituency. Associated with that is the question whether the Secretary of State for Education and Science should exercise his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944 and hold that the compulsory teaching of Punjabi is, in the circumstances, unreasonable.

Colton Hills is a comprehensive school on the edge of my constituency and it serves the ward of Penn. Some 54 per cent. of pupils are of Asian origin. At the beginning of the autumn term, parents of pupils in their first and second years found to their surprise that the pupils were required to attend Punjabi lessons as part of a language awareness course.

A significant minority of the parents objected when they found that the course was compulsory. The question is whether the Secretary of State should hold that the governors of the school and the local education authority acted unreasonably.

I would contend on a wider basis that compulsory attendance at Punjabi lessons is unreasonable. There are several reasons for that. Teaching Punjabi in Britain, or England, does not help pupils to understand or work in the English community. As you know better than most in the House, Mr. Speaker, Punjabi is not the language of all the Asian people. Punjabi has little practical application for most pupils in England.

As a Tory I draw upon tradition. The tradition of groups in this country, such as the Jews and, in more recent years, the Poles, has been to encourage the teaching of their language and culture in private lessons and not to all pupils in state schools. Forcing white, West Indian and some Asian children to learn Punjabi against their will and against the will of their parents has stirred up resentment against Asians generally.

Once the parents, who realise that the teaching is to be compulsory, hear of it being part of the curriculum of any school, there will be a tendency for those parents to exercise their choice by sending their children to other schools. In the example of Colton Hills school, we shall find that when parents who disapprove of the course are fully aware of its continuance—if the Secretary of State allows it to continue—they will exercise their choice, send their childen to other schools, and, sadly, the percentage of Asian children at Colton Hills will rise above 54 per cent. That can only be to the disadvantage of the Asian children.

The governors and the local education authority at Wolverhampton contend, with massive simplicity, that they have no prejudices. They assert that they are motivated only by a broad benevolence and an open-minded consideration of all the facts.

For my part, I recognise that my views may be wrong and prejudiced. I concede that they may not even be approved of by a minority of other parents. However, the Secretary of State may not be prepared to hold that the teaching of Punjabi, upon a compulsory basis, is generally unreasonable. But I hope that he will look at the special circumstances of the introduction of the course at the

school. I hope that he will hold that the way in which the LEA and these governors have stuffed their apparently liberal, but actually authoritarian, prejudices down the throats of these parents is unreasonable.

If the governors were to initiate the course upon a compulsory basis, they should have prepared the ground with care, but they did not. First, most of the parents were not given a copy of the prospectus. Secondly, the prospectus was ambigious on the question of whether attendance at Punjabi lessons was compulsory. Thirdly, no other attempt was made to prepare the parents and children for that compulsory course. Fourthly, the suggested compromise that the course should be made voluntary for this year only, in view of the failures of preparation, was rejected out of hand.

Fifthly — perhaps this is a wider and more serious point — the objectors to the course were treated with arrogance and abuse. From an early stage they were dismissed as racists, and those who accused them of being racists did not bother to explain what they meant. They merely thought that they would be cowed and frightened by that silly unspecific abuse and that they, the accusers, would be able to assert that they had a superior education and culture.

If it is thought that I exaggerate, I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the way in which the charges that I make were admitted by the chairman of the governors. First, I shall refer to what the chairman of the governors said about the prospectus. In a letter to me, he wrote:

"I am sure that you are aware that such documents are accurate at the time of writing. Almost always there are variations which are subject to further separate consultation."

I hope that Councillor Jones does not get a job in the City — bearing in mind the present climate — because if he did, and if he tried to justify prospectuses in such loose and generous terms, he might find himself either the chairman of a large merchant bank or in Winson Green, but I doubt whether he would find himself anywhere much between those places. Secondly, the chairman of the governors issued a press statement in which he said:

"Advance communication of the details of the course was not as extensive as the head teacher and governors would have considered ideal."

You may recollect, Mr. Speaker, that I, in a spirit of good will, suggested that there was a compromise. Well, that compromise was dismissed without argument. The chairman of the governors said:

"We feel that any attempt to make part or all of the language awareness course optional would only be damaging to the educational interests of the pupils concerned."

We were impertinent enough to ask for further and better particulars of that very general statement. But, of course, it would be too much to expect such important people to give the mere parents further details of their thoughts. They left it at that.

I contend that the governors and the local education authority have acted unreasonably in refusing to allow the course to be voluntary, at least in this academic year. But there are wider and more important issues that I wish to end by referring to. If the Secretary of State does not deal with this issue in a firm and decisive way, the problem will not stop here.

I have not troubled you, Mr. Speaker, and the House with the extensive and damaging literature which has been issued by the Labour group and by the governors of the school. It is obvious from the general philosophical remarks, which they put forward as though they were self-evident and obvious, that they intend, if they get away with this, to extend these compulsory courses to all the comprehensive schools in Wolverhampton.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will realise that if he allows these parents to be patronised and abused without check or hindrance, it will be seen in Wolverhampton as a signal. It will be the thin end of the wedge. It will be the signal for the general introduction of Punjabi on a compulsory basis in all comprehensive schools in Wolverhampton. All the parents in Wolverhampton demand the Secretary of State's protection from the social engineering which is the hallmark of the dominant and aggressive Labour group in Wolverhampton.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) for drawing this matter to our attention tonight and in the current issue of the *Spectator*. In the article and again tonight he has made some interesting comments, in his usually lucid way. I know that the case has produced strong feelings, and it might be helpful for the issue to be debated more widely in order that the implications and consequences of actions taken can be understood and noted by others who may wish to go down a similar route.

My hon. Friend has asked the Secretary of State tonight to consider using his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944, and my hon. Friend has already written to my right hon. Friend with that request. The Department has been making enquiries of the local education authority and a full reply will be sent to my hon. Friend as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I welcome the opportunity to examine some of the main aspects of the case.

Let me begin by telling the House the circumstances as I understand them. Colton Hills school is a community school. That means that it provides school education for its pupils during the normal school day and offers educational, social and leisure facilities for all members of the community after school, at weekends and in the holidays. One of the benefits of that arrangement is that it should give the school an opportunity to develop closer links with its pupils' parents. That point was made by my hon. Friend tonight and it strikes a chord immediately with me.

One of the benefits of this arrangement is that it ought to give the school an opportunity to develop closer links with its parents. The events to which my hon. Friend referred are not going down that road. The provision of Punjabi lessons at Colton Hills is apparently nothing new. Punjabi is one of the three main modern language options available from the 4th year onwards. The other two are French and German. At this level, none of the languages is compulsory; but of the present 250 fourth year pupils, 50 take French, 47 German and 22 Punjabi. All these languages are available to public examination level at 16-plus. For second and third year pupils, German is compulsory. In the third year, however, some pupils have the opportunity to take a second modern language which may be either French or Punjabi. So the teaching of Punjabi as a voluntary part of the modern languages curriculum is well-established at the school.

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

How is it, then, that the Punjabi lessons described by my hon. Friend have attracted such anxiety? These lessons were introduced in September of last year. They are part of what is called a "language awareness course" which is being taken by all first year pupils and which is organised in four nine-week modules. Three provide an introduction to a particular language. These are the languages which are offered later as full-time options—French, German and Punjabi. Modules run concurrently and pupils rotate between them; their experience is drawn together in module 4 which considers the structure of language as a whole. For each child, the time devoted to Punjabi is five periods a week over the nine weeks in question.

The course is not an isolated initiative. It is part of a wider programme to improve the teaching of modern languages at Colton Hills. The initiative came from the headmaster, but I understand that he was acting with the full support of the school governors and the local education authority. I understand also that the course will be regularly monitored by LEA inspectors and that the headmaster will make a report to the governors at the end of the summer term.

I should like to comment here on language awareness courses generally. Properly structured, these aim to give pupils both a general introduction to foreign languages and some basic linguistic skills. However, such courses are a fairly recent development and their educational merits are still a matter for debate. The necessary time often has to come from that which is normally devoted to the first foreign language taught and schools need to consider carefully — very carefully — whether this time can be spared without detriment to later studies. Let me emphasise, however, the importance of consulting parents. Education has always been about extending children's experience and deepening their understanding through contact with subjects which may at first be unfamiliar. But, where schools are seeking to change what they teach, they must take the parents with them.

In the present case, it seems that parents were involved only once the course had begun, and this was clearly wrong. Three meetings have taken place since, on 28 October, and on 7 and 25 November. I am told that each attracted a substantial audience, with strong views expressed both for and against. But I believe that much anxiety could have been avoided through better information before term began. The governors have said as much themselves; their statement of 26 November accepts that:

"mainly due to difficulties associated with the recent teachers' dispute, advance communication of the details of the course was not as extensive as the Headteacher and Governors would have considered ideal. The Governors recognise this and will attempt to ensure that this situation is rectified in future."

Then there is the question of the school prospectus. My hon. Friend suggested that it was misleading. It is true that there was no mention of language awareness courses in the last edition, but the authority tells me that, when this was published in autumn 1985, no firm plans for the course had been made. If that was the case, and knowing that the issue was so very sensitive, it might have been better to consult, to inform and to make the position clearer in the prospectus. Clearly, it would have helped matters enormously if the course had started less precipitously and after it had been promulgated in a changed published prospectus.

My hon. Friend has requested that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should intervene, using his powers under section 68 of the Education Act 1944. Section 68 empowers the Secretary of State to act where he is satisfied that any local education authority or the governors of any school have acted or are proposing to act unreasonably in the exercise of any of their functions under the Education Acts. The judicial test of what is unreasonable is very stringent. It has been defined in the courts as conduct such that no sensible authority or governing body, acting with due appreciation of its responsibilities, would have decided to adopt.

Within the meaning of section 68, it must be proved that the authority or governors have acted unreasonably. The lessons in question were introduced by the school with the support of the governors and the LEA. Some 220 pupils are involved, but the LEA says that only 12 formal complaints have been made to the school. Clearly, there is room for more than one opinion about the value of the course. I shall write to my hon. Friend about section 68 and his appeal under it.

The governors accept that there was a lack of consultation. For the future, the new Education Act should help to prevent any repetition of the difficulties which have arisen at Colton Hills. Strengthening the links between parents and schools is one of the main planks of the Act. Governing bodies of county, controlled and maintained special schools will be reconstituted to broaden membership. In particular, the number of parent governors will be increased so that parents have equal representation with the LEA. There will also be what for many schools will be a new category of co-opted governor representing the community served by the school. Colton Hills already has both parent and co-opted governors, but the numbers of both will be increased under the new arrangements. The new governing bodies in all county schools must be in place by September 1988.

Furthermore, the Act also requires every governing body to produce an annual report and to hold an annual meeting for parents to discuss it. Parents will be encouraged freely to express their views and to participate with governors in a full and business-like discussion. Therefore, it will be open to parents to raise any matter which concerns them. The first such meeting must be held in schools before the end of the summer term 1987.

The Act also makes curriculum policies much clearer and more open to public scrutiny and debate. LEAs will have to publish their own curriculum policies, and will be clearly accountable to the local electorate for them. Governing bodies in county and controlled schools will also have to establish aims for the curriculum of their school and may, if they wish, modify the LEAs policy in respect of the school.

The headteacher retains under the Act the responsibility for organising any curriculum and securing that it is delivered. He is constrained by the LEA's overall policy, but, if that has been modified, he can choose to follow the governors' modification.

All three partners will be acting under much closer public and parental scrutiny than in the past. The publication of curriculum policies, annual reports from governors to parents and the annual meetings with the parent body will help to ensure that no curriculum policy will be adopted or sustained unless it can be fully justified and commands wide support.

I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this matter to the attention of the House and for the robust and clear way in which he delivered his remarks.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 23 January 1987

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

SOCIAL FUND (MATERNITY AND FUNERAL EXPENSES)

Mr. Secretary Fowler, supported by Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Peter Brooke, Mr. John Major and Mr. Nicholas Lyell presented a Bill to empower the Secretary of State to prescribe, under section 32(2)*(a)* of the Social Security Act 1986, amounts, whether in respect of prescribed items or otherwise, to meet maternity expenses and funeral expenses: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Orders of the Day

Agricultural Training Board Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I thank my hon. Friends and those Opposition Members who have jointly sponsored the Bill. There is a common view on both sides of the House that acclaims successes in the agriculture industry, but there is also a common view that expresses concern about the need, as a result of that success, for farmers to think of other ways of earning income because of the need to curb the surpluses that are now occurring. I should also thank my hon. Friend the Minister and his officials for the advice that they have given me in the preparation of the Bill.

It is a short and, I am sure hon. Members will agree, non-controversial Bill. It is designed to enable the Agricultural Training Board to offer, on a fully commercial basis, training in various rurally related activities not previously within its scope. The offer will be made to all those employed in the industry and their families and will enable farmers to diversify their businesses. The board will also be able to offer those outside commercial agriculture and horticulture training in what I have referred to as amenity skills.

Before going into greater detail about the content of the Bill and its effects, I should like to set the scene by outlining the history and background of the board. Although I am sure that many hon. Members are aware of the existence of the board and its functions, I am equally sure that there are many, especially those in urban and suburban constituencies, who may not have had an opportunity to become familiar with its activities

The Agricultural Training Board was established in 1966 under the Industrial Training Act 1964. That Act provided for the setting up of other industrial training boards, each dealing specifically with training for workers in its own sector of employment in Britain. In common with the various industrial training boards set up under the 1964 Act, the Agricultural Training Board was originally the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Employment. The transfer of its functions to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales took place in 1969 and it accompanied a transfer in funding arrangements for the board from the self-funding industry levy system to direct Government funding. That became necessary as the extremely disparate and remote nature of the industry, together with its preponderance of small businesses, made the business of levy collection somewhat difficult.

The current legislation governing the board's activities comprises the Agricultural Training Board Acts 1982 and 1985 and the Agricultural Training Board (Amendment) Order 1975. Under that legislation, the board is allowed to provide, approve and make recommendations on courses, test standards of training, give advice, and carry out research connected with employment in the agriculture industry pay maintenance and travelling expenses to trainees, pay grants or loans to course providers and to

[Mr. Gerrard Neale]

pay fees to providers of further education and make payments to employers for attendance of workers on those courses.

There is one all-embracing constraint in the current law. These functions may be exercised only in connection with training for those employed, or intending to be employed, within the commercial agriculture or horticulture industries in Britain or equivalent employment overseas. The board exercises these functions through its central committees and its unique system of training groups nationwide, together comprising a form of training co-operative for England, Wales and Scotland. If hon. Members have not seen the "Review of Training in Agriculture and Horticulture 1985-86" published by the board, they may find that helpful where they have problems over training in their constituents.

Each of the training groups consists of a number of local employers in agriculture and horticulture. They arrange their own training courses as required by their members, often on their own premises. This ensures that the courses that are provided have a much greater relevance to their area. Many groups employ their own group training organiser to co-ordinate the training activities, working in concert with a local agricultural college, a careers office and relevant institutions.

The board's local training officer makes the necessary arrangements for those groups which do not have their own resources. The board contributes directly to training through grants to the groups, and more directly by developing courses, course materials and training trainers. A great deal of course training material is available and this is sent out in booklet form to local groups. The students can take these booklets away with them after their on-farm training.

There are about 650 groups in Great Britain and every farmer and farm worker should be within reasonable travelling distance of a training group. In my county of Cornwall there are 10 training groups, and of these five employ a part-time group training organiser. In 1985-86 these Cornish groups held a total of 501 training course days. These included adult training and training for those on the board's apprenticeship scheme—the Agricultural and Horticultural Training Scheme—and for those on the youth training scheme in agriculture and horticulture in the county.

Why does the board need to broaden its scope of activity even more? The principal reason, as I stated at the outset, is that the demands upon, and the expectations of, agriculture are changing dramatically. There is a growing need for the relevant training courses to be made available to meet the new demands and expectations. When such a need becomes apparent it would be churlish to deny those who wish to acquire such training access to the board's undoubted expertise. There is a good precedent for allowing that access. As recently as 1985 the need for the board to extend its activities overseas was identified. This was principally to complement the United Kingdom's other export efforts in the agricultural sector, not just to export a new agricultural system, but to sell the training courses to foreign people. At the same time, that profitable enterprise helped to broaden the board's financial base, not only by reducing its reliance upon Government funding but by helping to reduce costs of courses and course materials to students in Great Britain.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My hon. Friend served with me as a member of the Select Committee on Employment when we considered a number of training boards. Will my hon. Friend clarify the relationship between the Agricultural Training Board and other training boards? As I understand it, the other training boards come under the responsibility of the Department of Employment. I believe that the Agricultural Training Board is the only board that is dealt with separately. Is that so?

Mr. Neale: The Agricultural Training Board is the only board that receives direct funding from its sponsoring Ministry. However, it has representation across the country in a different form from that of any of the other boards, a number of which have now been abolished.

I want to consider the additional training needs that have been identified. Over the past few years the total Great Britain farm income as identified in the annual review of agriculture White Paper has fluctuated widely, but there is an underlying downward trend. This has been coupled with pressure on farmers to reduce production of a wide range of agricultural commodities that are in surplus. Particular measures in that area include the introduction—and subsequent cut—of milk quotas, the recently agreed package intended to reduce surplus beef production, and suggestions under discussion that some land should be diverted from cereal production. Farmers are therefore increasingly and often apprehensively having to look for ways other than the growing of traditional crops to maintain or increase their incomes. Many have considerable investment and loans involved in their land, buildings, stock and equipment which must be funded.

In addition, with the demand created by the increased leisure time available to the population generally, coupled with a growing awareness of the need to conserve, protect and enhance the environment, a greater need for training in these areas has developed rapidly. Some training is available from rural agencies such as the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, and the Countryside Commission. Other courses are provided by specialist training agencies such as the Forestry Training Council and by the agricultural colleges. However, the existing level of training is not sufficient to meet the ever-increasing needs of the agriculture and horticulture industries.

Manufacturing industry and commerce in Cornwall suffers from a comparatively uncompetitive location. Meanwhile, Cornwall's agriculture contributes about twice as much to the local gross product than is the case with the national economy. Agriculture in Cornwall is heavily dependent upon livestock, with dairying providing about 36 per cent. and other cattle about 25 per cent. of farming activity, much of which is carried out on small farms. It is evident that any measures intended to cut milk or beef production could have a more serious effect on the local economy than in other countries. Fortunately, we are blessed in the county with a mild climate and excellent scenery. This offers many opportunities for farmers to diversify their business, provided that they can acquire good quality training for themselves, their employees and their families.

Such diversification can take many forms. A major opportunity exists in the provision of tourist accommodation and other facilities. Indeed, a farm holiday group has already been established in Cornwall. Holiday makers are understandably keen to visit rural areas for recreation, and

there are already a number of "model farms" in the county of Cornwall which attract significant number of visitors. Other opportunities exist to expand on that theme and to provide a whole range of activity holidays such as pony trekking, painting, photography or sport holidays in rural areas. Despite the poor weather in the county last year —it was a particularly freakish year in that respect—we are trying to use every means available to influence the weather in subsequent years to ensue that those who wish to come to Cornwall for a holiday are guaranteed a hospitable and enjoyable time. I am sure that many more farmers will be ready to accommodate people should they wish to take that kind of holiday.

Farmers or farm workers may also wish to exploit their own or their family's skills in particular crafts or in technical areas. One particular craft that springs to mind in relation to Cornwall is the manufacture of surf boards. Surfing has become a very popular sport in the west country. Many farmers have redundant barns which can be used for the production of such equipment. This craft is typical of the latent artisic and technical skills that can be trained and directed to profitable effect.

The operation of services such as farm shops, taxis and village bus services may also be commercially more viable when operated in conjunction with existing agricultural businesses. Finally, we should not forget the on-farming processing if the products of farming itself. The obvious examples are cream, cheese and Cornish pasties. Some on-farm businesses have shown remarkable growth in those areas recently, in Cornwall and elsewhere.

In addition to specific training in the operation of all those activities as part of a business, we should not ignore the importance of training in marketing techniques. It is of little value to have an excellent product if it cannot be sold, and the board is mindful of that.

My Bill does not merely extend the board's scope to train those involved in farming in new activities. It will also permit the board to offer training in what I have termed "amenity activities" to those outside commercial agriculture and horticulture. Training should be available in skills relating to the care of land or animals, with sport, recreation and conservation in mind. Once again some training is available in those areas, but not enough. The Agriculture Training Board, with its highly regarded training methods, its knowledge of and relationship with the farming industry, and its expertise in land-related skills, is ideally placed to meet those various needs.

The Bill is a short one with only two clauses. The objective of clause 1(1) is principally to insert into section 4 of the Agricultural Training Board Act 1982 enabling powers for the board to undertake training activities in addition to those that are already permitted. The new activities are defined in new section 5A. To avoid unnecessary duplication of courses and facilities with other public and private sector agencies the addition to new section 4 requires the board to have regard to any courses or facilities otherwise available for the purpose before providing training in additional activities.

Clause 1(2) inserts new section 5A into the 1982 Act and specifies the additional training activities which may be undertaken. As section 5(1A) of the Agricultural Training Board Act 1985 is unamended, the board may not undertake these new activities outside Great Britain.

New section 5A(1)*(a)* specifies those who may be trained by the board in diversification activities. The section refers to training in

"activities not comprised within the industry."

That means the industry as defined in the 1975 order. Broadly speaking, then, the section is referring to non-agricultural skills of the type that I have mentioned.

Paragraphs (i) and (ii) of new section 5A(1)*(a)* define more closely the groups of people involved. Paragraph (i) refers to those employed in the industry. That does not mean merely employees, but employers and the self-employed; in other words, all who are actively engaged in a commercial agricultural or horticultural business. Paragraph (ii) refers to members of the families of people so employed. This is to avoid the position where a farmer or worker may be trained by the board, for example in the provision of tourist facilities, but a spouse, not strictly being employed in the industry, may not receive such training.

New section 5A(1)*(b)* introduces the other new area of activities which the board may undertake, namely, training in amenity skills of persons not currently employed in the industry. New section 5A(2) defines amenity skills for the purposes of new section 5A(1)*(b)*. For ease of reference the definition falls into two parts. The first, new section 5A(2)*(a)*, refers to skills directly connected to the land. There are three general areas of land use identified—sporting, recreational and environmental. I intend that the phrase,

"development, improvement, conservation or maintenance"

of such land should be all-embracing and cover all the activities which would need to be undertaken to make and maintain land fit for the purposes described.

The second part, new section 5A(2)*(b)*, refers to skills connected with the rearing or care, but excluding the training, of animals for sporting, recreational or environmental purposes. I recognise that the board, with its expertise in land-related skills, has much to offer in the training of people who keep or rear animals. This will include animals which may need to be protected or encouraged in the wild, and sport birds and fish, from which there may be associated benefits in conservation through the care of habitat.

New section 5A(3) obliges the board to consult the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales before providing new categories of courses or facilities.

New section 5A(4) imposes a duty on the board to conduct its affairs in such a way that revenue received from its new functions under section (4)(1)*(bb)* will at the earliest possible date at least meet the expediture incurred in the exercise of those functions, thereby ensuring that the board suffers no financial losses and that the activities are not funded by Government grants. This will make it fully competitive with other agencies which offer such training. This requirement is identical to that already accepted in 1985 by the House, which covers the board's overseas commercial activities.

It is intended that the board's new activities should not be a charge on Exchequer aid; rather, that by acting commerially the board may show some profit. If it should transpire that diversification and amenity skills activities do not prove to be self-financing, section 6 of the 1982 Act empowers Ministers to direct that the operation of such activities shall cease. Meanwhile, any pump-priming moneys required to finance these new activities must be found from income from existing commerical activities, rather than from grant-aid.

[Mr. Neale]

Clause 1(3) extends the Minister's powers under section 7 of the 1982 Act to disclose information to the board which will assist it in carrying out its new functions. Information already supplied under section 7 could be relevant to its new functions, and this clause merely expands the section in line with the board's new powers.

Clause 1(4) inserts a new paragraph, paragraph *(aa)*, into section 8(1A) of the 1982 Act, as amended by the 1985 Act. Section 8(1) requires the board to keep proper accounts and records and to prepare a yearly statement of account in the form determined by Ministers and the Treasury. The 1985 Act amplified the section of the 1982 Act requiring the board to keep separate records and accounts for its commercial overseas activities. New paragraph *(aa)* requires that a similar separate account should be kept, covering the new functions described in section 4(1)*(bb)*.

Although the Bill will expand the ATB, such expansion can only be for the overall good of the agriculture industry and, indeed, for the amenity and leisure industries. Not only will farmers and amenity workers who wish to learn a new skill benefit from receiving expert tuition in what is potentially a wide range of subjects, but basic agricultural skills training will benefit from the reinvestment by the board of additional income derived from these new sources. The record of the ATB in agricultural training shows that the board warrants not only continuing, but further, support in the direction outlined in the Bill, and I commend the measure to the House.

9.58 am

Mr. Ken Weetch (Ipswich): I wish to make a short speech in support of the Bill as I am one of its sponsors. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on his important initiative in bringing the measure before the House. It is important in terms of extending and diversifying acquired skills in rural areas and equipping agriculture to adapt to the changing circumstances of the future. That was perhaps the most important point made by the hon. Gentleman. Agriculture must face future changes in circumstances and it is essential that people involved in agriculture are trained to meet the new challenges. I hazard a prediction that when this short Bill reaches the statute book it will have more far-reaching significance than a good many other measures that have had a higher political profile in the House.

I have two purposes in giving the Bill my support. First, I agree wholeheartedly with what it tries to do in principle. Secondly—here I shall make a regional point—in the medium and long term there will be substantial opportunities through which the rural and industrial economies of East Anglia can benefit. East Anglia is predominantly an arable farming area. The long-term view for arable farming, in a much wider context than East Anglia, is that we simply cannot go on piling up arable surpluses without making some attempt to reduce structural excesses to a manageable proportion. In doing that, there must be a ground change whereby agriculture can adapt to new opportunities and provide new employment prospects.

The Bill seeks to amend the scope of activities of the ATB. Like any other organisation, it must operate under working definitions of what it can and cannot do. The Bill seeks to widen the terms of reference of the ATB and allow it to do more in areas such as recreation and the environment. Those two aspects are interconnected. The training activities that currently exist outside the remit of the ATB's agenda clearly should be part of the ATB's future responsibilities. If agriculture and rural areas are to adapt to future changes in circumstances, there must be a change in the ATB's training agenda.

The hon. Member for Cornwall, North clearly explained the purposes of the Bill and he outlined what the clauses seek to do. I shall refer to two areas mentioned in suggested new section 5A(1)*(a)*, which states:

"with a view to the diversification of the trades or businesses carried on by persons so employed".

The important word is "diversification". There must be diversification in the process of adaptation and aiming towards doing new things in rural areas. Proposed new section 5A(2)*(a)* refers to

"the development, improvement, conservation or maintenance of land for sporting, recreational or environmental purposes."

Those two aspects are important as they provide a way out of some of the pressing problems in agricultural employment and activity in rural areas.

The work of the ATB in Suffolk has been a success story, despite existing limitations, and I pay tribute to those who, over the years, have made this enterprise such a working success. It works through training groups and it has a training officer. Its training is conducted through both apprentice-type courses and regular participation in the YTS scheme. It has adapted to local circumstances. The training that it offers occurs on farms and in an agricultural college, and one group in Earl Soham has its own training centre. There are eight groups, five in agriculture proper and three in horticulture, and they have been a success on two counts. First, they have equipped young people with marketable skills and, secondly, they have meant that East Anglia is well to the front in agricultural quality.

East Anglia agriculture owes a debt to the board's training. The courses are diverse and by no means tied to the predominantly arable nature of the region. With the increased use of sophisticated machinery and the responsibility entailed by the increased use of chemicals and pesticides, some courses have a high-tech approach.

East Anglia supports the change in the Bill for very relevant reasons, because it wants to look to the future. First, farming in this country is in an age of surplus and the aims of public policy must change accordingly. Structural arable farming surpluses can no longer be financed on the scale on which they have been financed in the past. We cannot, as an aim of public policy, produce food on the scale that we did in times gone by. In the past, ever-increasing production and productivity were fundamental aims that overrode other matters, but that is no longer the case. There is a need to diversify and to look to other activities to ensure employment in rural economies. If this is to be achieved, training must be put on a wider and more flexible basis. For this reason, the changes highlighted in the Bill are not only desirable but essential.

We no longer need an agricultural policy—we need farm and countryside policies that are interdependent and can benefit from each other. In the post-war period in East Anglia, tens of thousands of people left the land, many of them young persons. If there are to be new opportunities for activity and if the ATB is to widen and build on the

success of its past performance to include the new scenario, we in East Anglia stand a chance of halting and reversing the decline.

I wish the Bill well. It is based on need and is a welcome and thoughtful step towards improving the economy of the countryside.

10.7 am

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): I am grateful for this opportunity to support my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale). This is a good Bill and will be of great benefit to the south-west and many other areas. I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing it forward. It also gives me much pleasure to support my hon. Friend, after the support that he gave me on the Okehampton bypass issue, particularly when I could not be in the House because I was ill. My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) has asked me to say that he fully supports the Bill and regrets that he has to be in his constituency today.

There is no doubt that the Bill is needed. Great changes have taken place in agriculture over the years. Having been involved in agriculture since I was a boy of 14, I have seen the enormous problems that have arisen because of the changing scene. The changes have caused considerable sacrifices to be made by rural people—sacrifices, as my hon. Friend said, including loss of employment, with all that that means.

We must face the fact that the demand for food has dropped—last year, a staggering 18 per cent. less butter was consumed—but production has been encouraged to increase dramatically. When I was a very young man, we thought that it was good if we produced 25 cwt of cereals to the acre. Now it has all changed. Modern machinery has meant that vast numbers of men are not required. Huge surpluses, because agriculture has been too successful, have resulted in cuts and quotas. This has meant a considerable drop in income and a decline in the economic life of rural areas affecting everyone—not only farmers but farm workers, machinery manufacturers and all those who service this great industry. We cannot be blind to those facts.

The worst sin of all is for some Opposition parties—I exempt the Socialist party—to say that there is no need for these cuts. I regret the fact that the Social Democrats and Liberals still carry on in their speeches in the south-west as though there were no problems. A letter which I received from the chairman of the economic and employment committee of Devon county council, Councillor Walker, an ardent Liberal, was written as though nothing had happened and he and others could continue misleading farmers into thinking that the status quo should continue. That is not true. It is unfair. There must be changes and cuts.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware of the recent remarks by the president of the National Farmers Union, Mr. Simon Gourlay, when referring to a speech by the leader of the SDP? He said:

"You will annihilate UK farming. You do not begin to comprehend what you are suggesting".

The average size of a farm in Britain is so much greater than the average size of a farm in Europe that any policies that might be beneficial to small farmers in Europe will be ruinous in this country.

Sir Peter Mills: I am well aware of that. One of the distressing problems in the political scene is that the policies of the Liberals and Social Democrats vary from constituency to constituency. It is sad that misleading statements are made. We must reduce agricultural production and find alternative ways of assisting farm workers and farmers. The Bill will do that.

We need to plan for a "revival"—a term that I like—of rural activity, and the Bill will assist. Activities must be encouraged to make up for the loss of production in normal farming. The Agricultural Training Board needs to have its powers and functions widened to offer training outside the scope of the industry to allow farmers to be trainined to take up other activities and to diversify their businesses. I do not think that anyone would argue against that view. Everyone should support the Bill.

I believe that this Government will support the extension of training to achieve a rural revival. Other measures are needed. It is no good men and women being trained in new skills if they are not allowed to set up businesses to use those new skills. There are currently too many central and local government planning restrictions and other, probably unnecessary, bureaucratic controls which stultify and frequently totally prevent farmers from diversifying and developing new and constructive uses for their land and buildings, not necessarily totally oriented towards traditional farming.

Probably the biggest problem is the heavy-handed planning restriction. No one wants this to be totally removed, so as to allow pre-war ribbon development and other uses that might be adverse to the rural environment, but there needs to be a more common-sense approach to opportunities for new businesses to be developed in the countryside. Only if such development occurs will employment be maintained or increased in rural areas while employment in traditional agriculture inevitably drops.

If the skills of farmers, farm workers and their families are to be widened and other enterprises set up, planning permission must be given.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson) *indicated assent.*

Sir Peter Mills: I am glad that my hon. Friend is nodding his head. I hope that the instructions to the planning committees of the various councils will be tougher and stronger, so that that becomes a reality.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend take account of the fact that, in park areas such as the Lake District, where I live, planning permission is required to be given by not only the South Lakeland district council but the special planning board, which leads to more difficulties?

Sir Peter Mills: I have similar problems with the national parks planning committee in Dartmoor. That is an important point. Local planning authorities should listen and act on Government advice to allow more small businesses to start up in rural areas. Germany has a good system of small factories where some members of a farmer's family can work while continuing to maintain the farm. We must develop that system in this country.

Redundant farm workers need the chance of work in their villages, but that will never happen if planning restrictions mean that small businesses are not allowed to start. I know of a disused Methodist chapel outside a village in North Devon. The planning authorities caused

[Sir Peter Mills]

endless trouble to the two people who were trying to use the chapel as a small factory. The authorities demanded double glazing, sound proofing and goodness knows what else. Such petty conditions hinder people in starting businesses. There is no doubt that many disused barns and other buildings in the countryside could be used for these purposes.

Training skills are needed, and the Bill will assist in providing them. We need a balance in rural society again. Work in the form of rural crafts, light industry and farming will be of benefit, if we can get the combination right to the rural revival and the rural environment about which I am so keen.

The south-west faces a problem because the fastest growing group in the south-west are retired people. I beg retired people to remember that people have to work. As I have said before, we cannot all live on fresh air and a view. Some of us have to find employment. There must be readjustment in rural life, because traditional ways cannot go on. A big change must take place.

There are restrictions other than planning. Farmers and their staff, because they live in the countryside, are still those most concerned with the conservation of the environment and the health of their animals. Unhappy, uncared-for stock do not grow and are not profitable. Extreme views on animal liberation, conservation of the environment, diet and health must not be allowed to take over the in the interests of short-term political expediency, often fuelled through substantial ignorance. The rural community needs to be assured that the urban politicians will not be too easily be swayed into making the farmers' already difficult financial position unnecessarily impossible.

Many other factors besides just training are involved if we are to achieve this rural revival that is so important for our areas, especially the south-west. Such factors are training, planning and allowing the farmer and the farm workers to get on with the skills and the jobs that they know so well.

I give a fair wind to this Bill. It will help effect the changes that must take place because of surplus production. If those measures are carried out, the rural scene will be revived.

10.20 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Shields (Ryedale): We in the alliance support the Bill. The legislation contained in it aims chiefly to assist the farming industry to diversify its activities. Diversification, whether into tourism, crafts or similar ancillary activities, offers an important opportunity to strengthen agriculture, but the Government's wish to be seen to be promoting the Bill arguably emphasises its sensitivity to the current malaise of British farming.

Before discussing the details of the Bill, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect for a moment on the need for that diversification. The slump in farm incomes, recorded at 43 per cent. in the 1986 annual White Paper, with not too great a recovery expected in the imminent review, the high levels of indebtedness, damagingly high interest rates and uncertainty about production practices and future prospects are symptomatic of a general failure by the Government to supply a lead to the industry.

The Bill, essentially an employment measure, is being introduced at a time when the number of jobs in agriculture, fisheries and forestry has fallen by more than one sixth since 1979. The immediate prospects are no less stark. Last week's Public Expenditure White Paper referred only to a "partial and modest recovery." The reasons are not hard to discern. Support for structural measures alone, which are particularly important in the hills and uplands — I have some of those in my constituency — is forecast to fall to £256 million in 1986-87 against £302 million last year, spending in that area alone has fallen by more than one third since 1983. So the welcome for this Bill is tempered by the recognition of the deep and continuing decline in agriculture that has taken place in recent years.

I shall comment briefly on some of the remarks made by Conservative Members. The alliance agricultural policies are directed to the preservation of the small farmers, but in recent years the policies of the dairy quotas, the co-responsibility levy on cereals and the variable beef premium have all added to the problems associated with people who have perhaps only 50, 60 or 70 acres. Those who have a large acreage — 2,000 acres — will lose on profits; the livelihoods of the smaller farmers are at risk.

As the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) said, we cannot live on fresh air, and neither can small farmers. At present Government policies are forcing more and more small farms out of business. Perhaps the Government should take note of the many bankruptcies that have occurred as a result of their policies.

The Bill proposes two changes to the current operation of the Agricultural Training Board. First, it allows the board to provide training for those employed in agriculture and their families through

"the diversification of agricultural businesses".

Secondly, it allows the board to offer

"training in amenity skills of persons who are not employed in the industry".

The need for the first dispensation arises from the Government's growing interest in diversification as a means of alleviating these problems of the industry.

Even though belated and modest, the Government's response to the case made by the alliance, not least at the time of the Second Reading of the Agricultural Bill in November 1985, for a change in direction in agriculture is welcome. Successful diversification could ultimately help to stop the outflow from farming to other employment —though only of course where that is available—as well as to maintain existing jobs in rural areas.

Diversification, which includes the judicious promotion of tourism, is certainly welcome. The maintenance and, in some cases, the revival of ancient handicrafts could bring interest and employment to our rural areas, not least to many in my own constituency where our Ryedale Quest will again encourage visitors to explore the delightful villages of north Yorkshire and thereby help to keep them alive.

It may also be argued that the Bill is a logical step in the progressive development of the ATB which has taken place since its foundation in 1966. Since that time, the board has developed from simply providing training for agricultural employees in agricultural techniques, and currently enjoys considerable support in the industry. The ATB's new responsibilities will have an important role to play, if only to restrain producers from trying to go into unsuitable enterprises or to diversify without the appropriate skills. These duties have therefore been welcomed by the National Farmers Union and the Tenant

Farmers Association. It seems sensible for the board to provide training in, for example, farm machinery maintenance for those who, although not employed in agriculture, nevetheless work with tractors, combines and other equipment.

In addition, the increasingly technical nature of modern farming results in a growing need for training and retraining to acquire new skills. Boys and girls can no longer go into farming on leaving school by simply staying on a farm. They need training in various and many agricultural techniques.

There is general agreement that the quality of training provided by the ATB is high, and that it should be more widely available than at present. Therefore, I believe that the Bill is a useful measure but it does not relieve the Government from their central task of providing consistent, considered and strategic advice to the industry. The future health of our rural economy depends upon the adoption of such an approach.

10.27 am

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I shall refer briefly to the speech of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mrs. Shields). She said that she was going to speak on alliance policies. What causes Conservative Members the greatest concern is that there are so many policies that it is difficult to determine exactly what policy the alliance is trying to put forward. No doubt if an attempt is made shortly to re-launch the various Opposition parties we shall hear more about a single policy rather than about policies. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) has now entered the Chamber, so no doubt we shall hear a little more about some of the additional policies that the alliance is putting forward.

Mrs. Shields: I assure the hon. Gentleman and all Members in the Chamber that the alliance will have one policy and that it will come out next week. It is a question, not of may be, but of will be. There will be one unified policy. Anything that applied when the two parties came together will be made one. It will be seen as one unified policy.

Mr. Thurnham: That will have to be prepared at great speed, because the hon. Lady referred to policies. Presumably much work will have to be done in the next few days to bring everything together into one single policy. We shall look forward to that with the greatest interest.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on his good fortune in winning such a high place in the ballot. Hon. Members are always interested to know the result of the ballot and the place that they have secured. I remember listening with great interest to the announcement of the ballot results in a Committee Room. The higher one's place in the ballot, the greater one's chances of success. Having secured a high place in the ballot, however, it is most important to introduce a Bill that will gain wide acceptance on both sides of the House. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be successful in securing that acceptance. I assure him that he will have my support in his efforts to place the Bill on the statute book.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) is about to leave the Chamber. I note that his Bill is listed on the Order Paper, and it is to be hoped that time will be available to debate it. He might be interested to know that production of agricultural products has increased so enormously because of improvement in livestock production. Embryo research has led to considerable improvements in livestocks, and those who are engaged in agriculture will know that this has been an important factor. Developments and improvements in agriculture in Australia, for example, have led to that country being in the forefront of human reproduction studies. The world's second test tube baby was born in Australia.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is difficult to relate test tube babies to agricultural training.

Mr. Thurnham: I am anxious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we should retain the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North. I should hate him to miss some of the issues that will arise in this debate that might be of interest to him at a later stage today.

As I have said, it is important to introduce a Bill that is acceptable to both sides of the House. I remember that last year my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam), although lowly placed in the ballot, was able to bring forward an excellent Bill dealing with corneal grafting. I think that his position in the ballot was No. 14, but his Bill gained rapid acceptance on both sides of the House and found its way quickly on to the statute book. I commend to hon. Members the idea that they should introduce Bills that gain wide acceptance on both sides of the House.

It is a pleasure to speak in the Chamber on a Friday when the atmosphere is conducive to a good debate, and I hope that we shall have a good debate today. I remember that when I first spoke in the House on a Friday I had only recently completed some calculations that showed that the cost of running the House was £10,000, or perhaps £20,000, an hour. I think that we should all be conscious of the length of time that we speak and ensure that we take the greatest advantage of that time. Fridays give us the opportunity, however, to have a constructive debate that can be of interest to Hon. Members of both sides of the House and to those outside who are concerned with the subjects that we discuss.

I served as a member of the Select Committee on Employment with my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North, and before this debate we discussed the fact that the Agricultural Training Board is not within the province of the Department of Employment. It is unique in coming within the direct sponsorship of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In the same way, the wages council for agriculture is not within the province of the Department of Employment. Thus, the Agricultural Training Board has slightly greater scope in the way in which it can relate to industry. This is possible as it does not have to meet the bureaucratic requirements that other training boards may feel they must comply with if they are to work in harmony with the relevant industries. We shall have to consider whether the activities of the Agricultural Training Board will conflict with those of other boards. It is important that the taxpayer is not involved in funding over provision.

Before speaking in detail on the Bill, I must declare a personal interest. I am a small-scale farmer in Cumbria, with rather more than 200 acres. Most of the land is tenanted, but part of it is freehold. My wife and I are

[Mr. Thurnham]

engaged in agriculture and we are concerned with broader aspects of farming, including the use of older buildings. There is a listed building on our farmland. It is a Pele tower, which is unique to our part of the country. It is a listed grade II building, and the use of such buildings and the wider interest that the public display in our heritage are factors which the board should take into account when widening the provisions and scope of the training that is being offered.

I was pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in his place for the early part of the debate. My farm is in his constituency and he knows of my personal interest in the subject.

Both my own family and my wife's have long connections with farming. My father was a tea planter throughout his working life. He planted originally in south India and then worked for Brooke Bond, being responsible for its tea estates worldwide. One of the better provisions of the Bill is that it gives the board scope to gain income from abroad by charging fees for the training that it can provide for those overseas who wish to learn about the great advances that have been made in agriculture in the United Kingdom.

My mother's family was engaged in market gardening for many generations, and my wife's family, too, has been active in farming. My wife has three brothers and they are all farmers. I am a refrigeration engineer and my business involves the provision of cold stores to keep food refrigerated. I am worried about the extent of United Kingdom food surpluses. There are 2 million tonnes of butter and beef in cold storage and this is costing a great deal. One of the effects of this is a distortion of the cold storage industry. I understand that it is costing £1 million a day to store the surpluses. We cannot tolerate any growth of the surpluses and we must seek ways of reducing them.

Anyone who is concerned with rural life must understand the need for diversification. It is important that farmers have other sources of income, and that has always been possible in traditional tourist areas. We must consider every form of income that can be brought into the farming community, so that there is less reliance on products that are in surplus. This must be to the benefit of farmers, who will have a broader source of income. Another beneficiary will be the taxpayer, who cannot continue funding products that are in surplus.

I well remember my first meeting with my wife's family, who farm just outside Cambridge. I became involved in a lively discussion about subsidies. I found myself in considerable trouble when I suggested that it would be expensive to pay for parkkeepers to keep the countryside tidy. To say that to a family of hardworking farmers who had acquired additional farms so that all three sons could go into farming meant that my courtship started rather stickily on that day. I think that all those who are involved in agriculture will accept, however, that we cannot continue producing commodities that are in surplus. It is necessary to take a much broader view.

I am surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North has not proposed that we should rename the Agricultural Training Board the Rural Training Board. The thrust of his speech was that we must address ourselves to the rural community. Consequently, it might be simpler and more straightforward if we regarded the board as a rural training board.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Thurnham: I note that the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) agrees with me. That is interesting, as the hon. Gentleman is one of the Opposition's spokesman on agriculture and is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. I think I am right in saying that I read today's newspaper yesterday. Sometimes I am confused about which day's newspaper I have read, especially when I read the day's newspaper the previous night because I have received an early edition of it, with the result that I cannot remember when referring to a newspaper article whether it was in the day's newspaper or in the edition that appeared on the previous day and found that it contained an article stating that the Labour party would launch a discussion document today.

Mr. Home Robertson: No, that was yesterday.

Mr. Thurnham: It appears that the Labour party proposes to have a Department of Rural Affairs, which would no doubt have greater scope than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is possible that the hon. Member for East Lothian will propose that the board should be renamed the Rural Training Board. We might be able to discuss that issue on another occasion.

It is excellent that there should be more self-funding provision. One of the best features of the Bill is that it does not call for additional public funding. My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North is looking for direct funding by the beneficiaries of the training themselves. If the Agricultural Training Board is to stand on its own feet and charge for its services, does my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) consider that it could be privatised? Presumably not every agricultural activity has to be funded by the state. If we live in a market economy, I believe that the more agricultural provisions that can be provided on a market basis the better. My hon. Friend should consider that.

Mr. Neale: My hon. Friend may not be aware that the Government have pegged the amount of funding for the board for some while. The board is looking increasingly for outside funding of its courses. I am sure Labour Members feel that because people had to pay for courses this can endanger the courses that are offered. However, on the contrary, the board has found that people are willing to pay for courses, if they are good, and therefore the board has become more market orientated. However, it would be a dangerous course to remove all Government funding. The Government must retain an interest, to ensure that the board continues.

Mr. Thurnham: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. My hon. Friend may think that it is dangerous to remove all Government funding, but it is also dangerous to become too dependent upon that funding. Nothing could be better than for any organisation to be fully funded by the market that it serves. By doing so, it escapes the fate that has befallen so many training boards.

I believe that in 1981, 16 of the then 23 training boards that came under the scope of the Department of Employment were abolished. That fate could befall the Agricultural Training Board if another party came into

power and financial stringencies were imposed. My hon. Friends will recall that in 1977 the International Monetary Fund had to bail the country out. It may be that at a future date the training board, funded by Government will be abolished. Therefore, the more funds the Agricultural Training Board can obtain from elsewhere, the better.

Sir Peter Mills: May I remind my hon. Friend and the House that, besides the Agricultural Training Board, the young farmers clubs run excellent courses in proficiency and so on, for which the members pay themselves. That could be encouraged and certainly in my role as chairman of the Conservative Back Bench agriculture committee I would suggest to the young farmers clubs that they move out and organise courses not only for agricultural training, but for other training, to take account of the changes that are taking place.

Mr. Thurnham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Perhaps the members of the Agricultural Training Board who are taking an interest in today's debate—I hope that they are—will consider in a future annual report extending the scope of training and acknowledging the contributions made by other people. The latest report that I have, that for 1985-86, shows that the Government funding in that year was £7·74 million, which accounted for 84·6 per cent. of total funding.

The big change has been the amount of money coming in from the Manpower Services Commission through the youth training service. The Agricultural Training Board should change the balance of its funding and seek other sources that will strengthen it and make it less liable to difficulties in the future.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Is my hon. Friend aware that Government funding is taken from the agricultural support market for the industry and therefore the funding comes from the agriculture industry?

Mr. Thurnham: The total cost of the agriculture industry to the taxpayer is £2 billion. I am sure the taxpayer hopes that, over the course of time, if farming continues to be as productive as it is, agriculture will be less rather than more dependent on the taxpayer. I hope that the board will extend its sources of income by widening the scope of its activities as set out in this excellent Bill.

The Bill is not in the business of making a levy. Only last week we debated the Construction Industry Training Board and there was a proposal to increase the payroll levy from 1 to 2 per cent. for certain classes of contracted-out labour. When the Agricultural Training Board was set up it was found that it was not possible for the board to raise its funds through a levy because of the nature of the industry. Of course, farmers are always reluctant to part with any money, and that would have been necessary if a levy had been imposed. I sincerely hope that there will be an opportunity to increase outside funding, because that must be to the advantage of the board and its future operations.

I welcome the widened scope of services offered. We certainly need more training and to remove restrictions on the type of training. I am surprised that in the Bill there are restrictions on the type of training to be provided. There is the strange anomaly of the exclusion of the training of animals. I do not understand why such training has been specifically excluded.

A near neighbour in Cumbria recently applied for planning permission for an indoor riding centre. Unfortunately, permission was refused. This is one of the difficulties faced by farmers. Show jumping would have been an integral part of that centre. I do not understand why we should exclude the training of show jumpers, in which this country leads the world, from the rural activities that we are trying to encourage.

When the Bill is in Committee, as I am sure it will be shortly, I hope that my hon. Friend will reconsider that provision most carefully. There should be fewer restrictions. I read somewhere that there is anxiety that the Agricultural Training Board will, in some ways, turn itself into a racehorse training board. What is wrong with the training of racehorses if it is an activity that can contribute to the life of the countryside? Such training provides an enormous levy for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, which in turn helps to pay for the agricultural subsidies. I do not understand why there is any restriction at all on the training provided.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I hope it will be made clear in Committee that the Bill restricts the training of people to train animals.

Mr. Thurnham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that it does not go as far as I feared.

I am sure that the general intentions of the Bill will be welcomed by town and country dwellers alike. We are not merely proposing greater training for those who live in the country. It is the ambition of many town dwellers to get a job in the country. If we widen the scope of jobs that are available in the country, that must be to the advantage of town dwellers. I welcome the provisions in the Bill to provide training for those who are already involved in agriculture, and also for those who are outside the agriculture industry at present. If the board is funded by the taxpayer in the future, as it has been in the past, it is important that all the people who contribute to the funding of the board should benefit from its widened scope.

For farm workers, anything that reduces their reliance upon the strict specialisation that operated in the past must be an advantage. It is a tragedy that the restrictions that applied to the Agricultural Traning Board in the past resulted in people being trained so narrowly that all they could do was to contribute to the surplus of labour that was already presenting a problem to the industry. I hope that in future that will be less of a difficulty.

The west country has always been a favourite area for tourists. My favourite product from Cornwall must be clotted cream, for which it is renowned. There is little to rival the quality of farmhouse cream teas in Cornwall. I have always thought that Cornish farmers were in no way behind the times in their knowledge of how to market a fine product. Marketing will, no doubt, be one of the disciplines that can be taught by the Agricultural Training Board in future under these wider provisions. I am sure that those who are concerned with the industry in Cornwall will be able to teach others quite a lot about marketing. They are not behind the times in knowing how to market their services there.

I am a member of the council of the Cumbria tourist board. When remarks are made that are damaging to the tourist industry, they cause enormous concern. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North is not

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suffering in his constituency from the trouble that we have experienced in Cumbria. The would-be Member for Knowsley, North, Mr. Huckfield, made the most damaging remarks about the tourist industry in Cumbria, and they have led to great setbacks and difficulties. It is important that in its widened scope the Agricultural Training Board should be able to educate all members of the public who are in a position to influence opinion that they should not make remarks that are as damaging to the tourist industry in Cumbria as Mr. Huckfield's remarks have been. He spoke about the effect of the nuclear industry on Cumbria, and his remarks have led to reductions in employment in Cumbria's tourist industry.

I support all the provisions of the Bill. They will enhance tourism, for which there is great scope. Farm buildings have traditionally been a good place for a holiday. I hope that the Agricultural Training Board will be able to work closely with other training boards that are involved in the tourist industry. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has been able to consider the relationship between the ATB and the Hotel and Catering Training Board. The two must overlap to a great extent. As provision is being made for farmers to learn other skills, the provision of farmhouse accommodation will bring farmers into the hotel and catering industry. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has been able to consider whether there should be joint provision of training by the two training boards.

Mr. Neale: It is not the intention—indeed, it is not possible under the Bill—for the Agricultural Training Board to enter into the substantial duplication of existing courses. The intention of the Bill is that by encouraging those who are involved in farming to diversify, the board should find out how best it can fill the gaps in training that need to be filled if the industry is to take advantage of the new opportunities.

Mr. Thurnham I am glad that my hon. Friend has been able to consider the point. If the board is able to fill gaps in the existing provision of training, that can only be welcomed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West referred to the difficulties caused by planning restrictions. If we are to expand the rural economy from its traditional activities in the past to new activities in the future, planning will be one of the most sensitive and difficult areas. I hope that the Government's great interest in reducing the burdens on industry, and also in deregulation, will lead to it becoming easier for the countryside to be used in a broader sense for the enjoyment of all, instead of restrictions being imposed because of a narrow view of what should or should not be done.

Whether or not there should be more housing development in the countryside is a sensitive area that will have to be considered with great care by local planning boards. However, I hope that new industries will be looked at in openminded and constructive ways by the planning boards, so that training can be provided in new occupations as they arise. It is impossible to know what new industries will develop that are suitable for the countryside, but it is important that planning restrictions should not throttle and stifle new developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North referred to training boards in particular parts of the country. The Lancashire agricultural training board is the training board that is of the greatest significance to my constituents. I am glad to say that we have more training groups in Lancashire than my hon. Friend has in his county of Cornwall. I understand that there are 12 different groups in the county, managed by local farmers. I imagine that those groups are managed in much the same way as they are managed in Cornwall. In the current 12-month period, 350 course days will have been held. Over 300 youngsters have benefited through the new training scheme from training in the industry.

I am a little concerned that the Lancashire agricultural training board's activities should still be very much related to the provision of agricultural skills. I understand that, in special training, emphasis has been placed upon beef production, soft cheese making and yoghurt making. The training has been aimed at dairy farmers, but we must find a way of extending the scope for training people who have depended upon farming in the past for their livelihood. We must encourage a move away from the traditional industries. Cheese making and yoghurt making should be encouraged, but we must look much more widely than that. I hope that the Lancashire ATB, under the excellent chairmanship of Mr. Talbot, will be able to widen the scope of its activities.

I am conscious of the time and am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak in this debate. Therefore, I end by congratulating once more my hon. Friend on introducing a Bill that will extend the scope and activities of this industry. I hope that the bill will be welcomed as it continues on its way through both this House and the other place. I shall give it my greatest support.

10.56 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) prefaced his remarks by saying that he wanted to have a constructive debate on the subject of the Agricultural Training Board Bill, and he went on to give us a blow-by-blow account of his courtship of a farmer's daughter in Cambridgeshire. Anyone who makes the mistake of reading this debate, or any members of the public who are making the mistake of listening to it, must wonder what on earth is going on. At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Gentleman made it abundantly clear that what he was really doing was taking up time in order to prevent the Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, which is third on the Order Paper today, from being reached and debated.

Mr. Thurnham: I hope that I made it clear that, being involved in farming myself and with my wife being the owner of over 200 acres of land, I have a very great interest in the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting in any way that my contribution to this debate was on anything other than a proper and genuine basis.

Mr. Home Robertson: Of course the hon. Gentleman's speech was entirely in order; otherwise you, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have stopped him in his tracks. However, I am amazed that he managed to make that intervention with a straight face.

We have had an interesting debate so far, which I understand will be interrupted in about three minutes by

the Leader of the House. Perhaps, therefore, I may tread water for a minute or two as well and then try to take up the thread of the debate a little later.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) referred to his deep commitment, and that of his party, to the rural revival. He could have fooled me, in view of the conduct of this Government and this particular Minister of Agriculture towards the rural areas of Britain throughout the seven years of this Administration. It is worth noting that, although the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West is committed so deeply to the rural revival, the Government that he supports have published no White Paper on rural policy. They have staggered from one crisis to another and farming is in dire difficulties.

We do not know what is the Government's policy, any more than we are yet familiar with the policy of the alliance, although I am delighted to see that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has seen fit to come and take part in the debate. He made an interesting speech recently on the subject of agriculture, in which he suggested a policy which at a stroke, would increase European Community funded support to all farmers in all countries on the mainland of Europe, while cutting the support to farmers in Britain.

I understand from the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mrs. Shields) that the alliance intends to publish a document on agricultural policy in the next week or two. We shall be fascinated to see what it says and whether it includes the sort of ideas that were being suggested by the right hon. Member for, Devonport during his recent lecture that he delivered recently.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Business of the House

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about changes in the business announced for next week.

In the light of your ruling yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and following discussions through the usual channels, the business for Tuesday and Wednesday will now be as follows:

TUESDAY 27 JANUARY—Until about seven o'clock, there will be a debate on a Government motion arising out of Mr. Speaker's decision on 22 January.

Afterwards, Second Reading of the Ministry of Defence Police Bill (Lords)

Motions relating to the Dockyard Services (Devonport) (Designation and Appointed Day) Order and the Dockyard Services (Rosyth) (Designation and Appointed Day) Order.

WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY—Oppostion day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The failure of the City to serve the nation".

Motion on the London Regional Transport (Levy) Order.

Second Reading of the Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners Bill will be taken at a later date.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): After the exchanges yesterday on Mr. Duncan Campbell's film and his article in the *New Statesman,* the House is not surprised that the Leader of the House has made a further business statement today. But why have the Government not tabled a motion on the Order Paper? Is it because it is the Government's intention to seek a limited debate on Mr. Speaker's action yesterday, or are they contemplating a motion that has wider scope and may be much more controversial? When shall we be told the Government's intentions?

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. The choice of motion is a matter of sensitivity and judgment. The Government are considering the terms of the motion, and will draft and table the motion as soon as practicable.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): When my right hon. Friend considers the terms of the motion, will he ensure that there is nothing in it that might impair the rights of the Select Committees of the House? At the same time, will he ensure that its terms are sufficiently widely drawn to enable those of us who want to do so to debate the extraordinary willingness of some hon. Members to use the procedures of the House to breach the defences of national security?

Mr. Biffen: I can give the undertaking sought by my hon. Friend in respect of Select Committees. I take note of his concern about the terms of the motion in respect of the second point that he makes.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Leader of the House consider using time after the debate on Tuesday for a continuation of the proceedings on the Local Government Finance Bill not for the Ministry of Defence Police Bill *[Lords]*? Is the Leader of the House aware that the House will be in extraordinary difficulty if the remaining stages of the local government Bill including Report, are taken on Monday? The Government have amended the Bill 38 times. There has to be a Report stage,

[Mr. Jack Straw]

but under Standing Orders that is not possible until the Committee has reported to the House, which means that the House will not have any copies available of printed amendments.

Mr. Biffen: As the hon. Gentleman will have noted, Monday's business stands unaltered. Perhaps the points that he makes may be considered through the usual channels, but I do not hold out any substantial hope of alteration.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the House will welcome the opportunity to discuss and support the decision that you, Mr. Speaker took in difficult circumstances? When the Government frame the motion will they take into account the fact that any attempt to lay down regulations that may in any way restrict the activities of private Members should not be undertaken lightly or in haste? The decision deserves most careful consideration and should not be taken on Tuesday in the heat of the moment.

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes, and makes more effectively by the moderation with which he puts it.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): This is a delicate balance, but will the Leader of the House lean towards a narrow motion? Will he reflect — if he is thinking of a broader motion—on the debate that took place in the House and the view that was expressed on both sides that a mechanism of scrutiny of the intelligence services, and all the areas that relate to confidentiality, must now be achieved by the House? Some form of procedure involving Members from both sides of the House capable of being given sensitive information in rather carefully guarded circumstances is a necessary part of safeguarding democracy.

Mr. Biffen: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that there is a question of balance when considering how best to proceed with the debate on Tuesday. I note his substantive point. He will recognise that this is somewhat controversial, and no doubt will be raised again and again.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am sorry that time which had been set aside for deliberation of the Health Service Commissioners Bill should be lost while we spend time debating procedures of the House that have been misused by some people to try and pry into matters that they should be content to leave alone.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend's question contains a degree of controversy, which is a prelude to the lively debate that may take place on Tuesday, but the House would have thought it very remiss if arrangements had not been made for the topic to be taken as speedily as practicable.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): The House will be grateful to the Leader of the House for reacting so positively in respect of your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Duncan Campbell's film. But is the Leader of the House satisfied that a proper debate can take place when some Members of the House have seen the film officially, some unofficially, some have seen excerpts of it on ITV and others have read accounts of the film in the *New Statesman*? Is it not time that the House was encouraged to see what it will debate before the debate?

Mr. Biffen: I shall have to distance myself from that observation, because the debate will essentially deal with the problems of an injunction. If we begin to pick and choose whether we think that the injunction should or should not have been granted, we shall be in some difficulty in these matters.

Agricultural Training Board Bill

Question again proposed. That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.8 am

Mr. Home Robertson: If we can return from the consideration of a non-existent film about a non-existent spy satellite to the more mundane affairs of the Agricultural Training Board Bill, I shall return to the pattern of the speech that I originally intended to make.

I commence by congratulating the hon. Member for Cornwall, North on his good fortune in achieving the high place in the ballot for private Members' bills, and his choice of the useful and constructive subject. I have some experience in the lottery for Private Members' Bills; last year I came 12th and brought in a Bill, how the Protection of Children Bill (Tobacco) Act, which had widespread support and eventually reached the statute book.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: For goodness' sake, the hon. Member has been havering on for some time already. Is it necessary for him to intervene again?

Mr. Thurnham: I want to commend the hon. Gentleman on having brought a Bill forward from 12th in the ballot, that gained acceptance and got on to the statute book. I commend to other people who are drawn in a similar position that they bring forward Bills which will also gain acceptance.

Mr. Home Robertson: I do not have the termerity to advise other hon. Members of the House on what sort of Bills they should bring forward. Hon. Members must make their own choices about the nature of their Bills.

The hon. Member for Cornwall, North has given us a useful opportunity to improve the legislation in relation to the Agricultural Training Board. I am in a rather curious position here, because on the one hand I am the official Opposition spokesman dealing with agriculture and given the responsibility for covering the Bill and its progress through the House; and I am also a sponsor of the Bill, which shows that there is widespread support for the principle of the Bill. Indeed, it is a happy coincidence that this debate comes only one day after the launch of the Labour party's new Green Paper on agricultural policy, which suggests that active steps should be taken to diversify the rural economy and to help farmers to develop new uses for land and buildings in order to protect and promote employment in rural areas. That, as I said before we were interrupted, is in marked contrast to the drift and lack of policy from the Government. I hope that our suggestion will help to promote debate in that area.

It stands to reason that any process of extending and diversifying agriculture and extending employment in rural areas will require training in new skills which may not be directly related to agriculture and horticulture. Therefore, it is vital that steps should be taken to make such training available and the Agricultural Training Board is the obvious candidate for that task.

I am familiar with the activities of the Agricultural Training Board. It has carried out courses on my farm on the maintenance of machinery, the operation of chain saws and other things. The board runs a range of courses on farms and market gardens in my constituency of East Lothian.

However, I have been advised that on at least a couple of occasions current restrictions on the board's scope of activity has cramped its style in potentially useful work in my constituency. A group operating under the community programme of the Manpower Services Commission asked the Agricultural Training Board to assist with training to restore and convert an old farmsteading near Musselburgh in East Lothian for alternative use. But the people on the project were outside the legislative scope of the training board as it stands. Similarly, the Agricultural Training Board was approached by the Lothian health board for help with training some of its staff in the safe spraying of chemicals. Again, that was outside the scope of the board. As I understand it, the Bill will overcome that problem and in that sense it is clearly worth while and necessary.

In my constituency we have been giving much thought to rural development, which has been touched on by several hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) and the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West. In my constituency the East Lothian district council has set up its own rural policy committee, working on a range of initiatives to revive our village and countryside communities. It is imperative that farmers should play their part in that process.

Mercifully, we in East Lothian have been spared the worst ravages of the milk quota cuts, but that is only because there were few dairy farms in that part of the world in the first place. However, East Lothian has some of the most fertile land in Scotland, which is inevitably making its contribution to the cereal surpluses just now. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before drastic changes will have to be imposed on the industry in one form or another. I am determined that the economy and the landscape of the area must be protected in that process.

That means finding new uses for farm buildings and new enterprises on farms—whether tourism, crafts or any of the alternative enterprises that various hon. Members have mentioned, such as sport. Indeed, we have a lot of golf courses in East Lothian already. The open golf championship will take place at Muirfield this year. If anyone is angling for an invitation I will see him afterwards. The Government leak stories to *The Observer* and other newspapers about some obscure Cabinet committee code named ALURE suggesting that there may be interesting new developments and the lifting of planning restrictions to make it possible for golf courses to be spread all over the countryside, but I suspect that we have enough already in East Lothian. However, that is certainly an idea. What would worry me about that—several hon. Members have talked about the possible lifting of planning restrictions in rural areas—is that I would not like to see Barratts and the like given a free hand to build rural shanty towns all over the countryside. There is a need to retain reasonable planning restrictions, while recognising the need for development and diversification in the rural economy.

There has been some pioneering in agricultural diversification in my constituency. Only a few months ago, I visited a farmer who had started a new enterprise rearing a specialist breed of goats for the production of cashmere, which will apparently be rather lucrative. I can think of a mushroom enterprise and other involving fruit and vegetables, flowers and fish farming — all strictly agricultural operations. In addition, in East Lothian we have had one of the first farming, forestry and wildlife

[Mr. Home Robertson]

advisory groups in Scotland. Therefore, the farmers in my constituency have shown their willingness to support and protect the environment in that part of the world.

I should like to see a number of ways of encouraging alternative enterprises, whether tourism, craft or other types of industry, and, indeed, forestry. It is important —this is part of the Labour party's new Green Paper on this issue— that there should be a Government scheme to promote the planting of trees on agricultural land, and that must include arable land if it is to have any impact on the production of surpluses.

I have had experience of the agricultural training systems. I went to the West of Scotland college of agriculture, as, I think, did the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), and the agricultural course that I did there made no mention of trees. No part of that course dealt with how to plant and protect trees, the different species of trees and what types of land were most appropriate for the planting of different types of trees. Farming and forestry have hitherto been completely divorced. There must be changes in that area and that will require specialist training and skills which are not currently covered by the agricultural training board.

I have had several representations from my constituency and other bodies in Scotland showing their support for the Bill. I know that the agricultural workers section of the Transport and General Workers Union in Scotland has shown its support for the Bill, as has the National Farmers Union of Scotland and a valuable and worthwhile pressure group called Rural Forum, which is working for rural development in Scotland. Willie Swan, the chairman of Rural Forum, has written to me saying:

"We believe in Rural Forum that if the ATB is to be able to provide the training which will be required by a diversified agriculture, it should have much wider powers and become in effect a rural training board."

That point has already been made in the debate. Therefore, there is full support for the principles behind the Bill.

I want to raise three specific points, two of which are Committee points for the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) of which it is fair to give him notice now, and one broader point which is really for the Minister's attention. My first point concerns the drafting of the Bill and the definition of the people who will be eligible for training under an amendment which refers to

"the training and skills relevant to the carrying on of activities not comprised within the industry of persons who are employed in the industry and members of their family."

There is also a case for including people who have been employed in the industry, because many people in rural areas have been made redundant. People are losing their jobs particularly on dairy farms just now. I fear that someone who has been made redundant and is no longer employed on a farm could find himself excluded from the scope of the Bill as it stands. Perhaps we could consider that point in Committee.

My second point has already been touched on. That is the definition of amenity skills which will be eligible for training under schemes within the new legislation. They are defined as

"skills which are relevant to the development, improvement, conservation or maintenance of land for sporting, recreational or environmental purposes or the rearing or care of animals for any such purposes."

There is one potentially controversial area about which we should be open, and that is sport.

If a partially publicly funded body is to give training or any kind of support for controversial types of sporting, for example fox hunting or hare coursing, that would give rise to some difficulties. The hon. Gentleman and the Government should be given fair warning of that point, which we shall be able to discuss in Committee.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does the hon. Gentleman include fishing in those comments about what he may consider to be controversial sports in which some people do not wish to participate?

Mr. Home Robertson: I was not expressing a personal opinion about any of those sports. I was simply putting the point, which I think is self-evident to hon. Members in all parties, that those two sports are controversial and some people feel very strongly against them. I did not include fishing in my remarks; I talked specifically about fox hunting and hare coursing and we shall need to address ourselves to that point in Committee.

My third detailed point is addressed to the Minister and concerns funding. It is all very well for the Government to give a fair wind to a Bill like this and to say that they support the principle of extending the scope of training under the Agricultural Training Board. The Government will be able to say, "Look, aren't we marvellous? We are doing something about rural diversification." I put it to the Minister that, under the Bill, the Government will be doing precious little about rural diversification. All they are doing is altering the terms of the legislation; they are not putting any resources into it.

I recognise the inhibitions on private Members in the drafting of private Members' Bills. However, it would not be beyond the powers of the Minister and the Government to introduce a money resolution of some description which would make it possible to make additional funds available to the board actively to promote the things that all hon. Members are in favour of.

The Government have an appalling record in this area. They have made petty-minded cuts in ADAS, the Scottish agricultural colleges and the availability of advice especially to small farmers who can least afford to pay for advice from ADAS, at the very time when those small marginal enterprises most need advice on how to diversify and remain in business. Such cuts are in marked contrast to the runaway expenditure on intervention buying and bring little credit on the Government. The Minister owes it to the House and the industry to say a little more about funding.

After those few brief remarks, I should like to assure the hon. Member for Cornwall, North that we support the principles of the Bill. I congratulate him again on his good fortune in the ballot and his good judgment in selecting this subject. I hope that the Bill will be on the statute book before long, and that there will be a money resolution to provide sufficient funds so that it will lead to some action in the countryside.

11.22 am

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): It gives me great pleasure to support the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale), which will make further provision with respect to the functions of the Agricultural Training Board.

My association with the training board goes back to its inception 20 years ago, and, as a result, I believe that I should declare an interest. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), recalled how we both received our agricultural training at the same college. I cannot imagine what went wrong with the training after I left.

Before I speak on the Bill, I should like to comment on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mrs. Shields) about the devastating effects of high interest rates on farmers' incomes. The hon. Lady should be aware of the statistics that are available to everybody and which show that more farmers lend money than borrow it. The gross indebtedness to agriculture is carried by the 2,000-acre farmers, about whom she talked, who are supposed to be earning a fortune. The hon. Lady should look at the statistics and make sure that she gets it right for the policy document next week.

During the earlier part of the Agricultural Training Board's life I was an examiner specialising in livestock courses; I still pay my group training membership. Who knows, if the additional provisions become law, I may be able to run a course on the advantages for farmers of political awareness. I am sorry to see that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has gone. I am sure that he believes that farmers are well and truly politically aware now.

In its early days, the ATB had few friends. However, once the advantages that would accrue to the industry and farmers were known, by making use of the board's training and retraining provisions, it has become an integral part of the industry. There would be great hostility if anyone ever suggested ending the Agricultural Training Board.

The highly successful Agricultural Training Board service in the county of Nottinghamshire provides for accurate local assessment of the training needs of farmers and horticulturists, and for a response to those needs, largely in the form of short courses. Those courses are essentially practical and are held for small groups of trainees so that the individuals gain genuine "hands-on" practice under the supervision of highly skilled instructors. In an average year, over 1,500 farmers and farm staff in the county participate in courses that cover a wide range of agricultural and horticultural production and deal with all occupational levels. Virtually all the training is now delivered through the network of nine training groups, to one of which all farmers have reasonably convenient access.

The productivity record of the industry is well known and second to none. That has been brought about by the industry accepting new production methods and technology. However, the importance of the ATB in that achievement was in transferring that knowledge and skills to those employed in the industry. The tremendous success is now evident in the unwanted food surpluses. For no other reason, change to both the industry and its training board must come, but under the present legislation the expertise and training materials that the ATB has developed over 20 years cannot encompass that change, despite requests for it to provide a training service in land maintenance skills and supervisory and management skills, to utilities such as water authorities, electricity boards and local councils. There is also training demand from garden centres, leisure parks and small rural industries.

In my historic and famous constituency of Sherwood, there is a great opportunity to take advantage of the increased tourist activity. The catalyst will be the new centre park holiday village being built in the heart of Sherwood Forest, and costing £32 million. Already one farmer has opened a rare breed section as a tourist attraction on his farm, reducing his output of unwanted cereals. However, the rural community in general will need courses on how to exploit the opportunity from tourism. There is no better organisation than the Agricultural Training Board to teach them how to achieve that goal.

I commend the Bill to the House and am delighted to be associated with it.

11.28 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I rise to support the Bill wholeheartedly and should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on his initiative and also on the excellent way in which he has presented his Bill this morning.

The Bill seeks to widen the scope of present Agricultural Training Board and to meet the challenges now facing the industry. I note with pleasure that it will achieve that aim on a self-financing basis.

I was brought up on a farm on the Somerset-Wiltshire border, and I observed the technological revolution in the farming industry over some years. I have seen the British farmer adapt to tremendous change. When I was a small boy, many farm workers milked large herds by hand. Then the vacuum milk bucket was introduced, followed by the line parlour. Now we have the herringbone and rotary parlours. All that has happened in the space of 30 years. It is an incredible change, and has required guts on the part of farmers, in the investment that they have made. We have also seen the effect of that change on the number of people living in the countryside. For example, the difference between the number of people needed to milk a herd of 200 cows by hand compared with the number needed today is tremendous. Thus, there has been a large flow of farm workers from the countryside.

We have seen the British farmer accept tremendous risk in investment, not only in land but in equipment and machinery—and, indeed, in seed fertiliser and stock. At the same time, there has been an enormous increase in productivity. If only British manufacturing industry could have matched even one quarter of farming's productivity increases, we would be in the same position as Japan today. The increase in productivity has also meant a flow of people from farming into other industries, and from the countryside into other activities in small towns.

The British farmer has been constantly urged to produce more and more. He has met that challenge by outstanding management and effort. Many farmers whom I know, particularly in the Winchester and Hampshire area, have achieved dramatic increases in productivity, particularly in cereal production. That was a barren area before the first world war, and land was going for £5 an acre. Increases in productivity have been fantastic. However, now there are massive food surpluses in both North America and Europe. Farmers are being urged to cut back at the same time as real farm incomes are turning downward and farm asset prices are falling.

As I said, people have been driven off the land by technology and increases in productivity. We have seen inflation-led land prices discourage new people from coming into farming, and we have also seen those same

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inflationary rises in land prices encourage some farmers to sell to major institutions — again resulting in a social denuding of the countryside.

Now there are restrictions on beef production, milk quotas and price restrictions on cereals. All that portends the risk of forcing more farmers off the land, denuding the life of the rural areas yet further. Therefore, we need a real rejuvenation of the rural areas. In order to do so, we have to find alternative uses for land and buildings. We must also find new ways of encouraging rural employment and keeping people in the villages and the country areas. In short, I believe that we must show creativity and flexibility in meeting the challenges that face agriculture. The Bill both allows for and encourages creativity and flexibility. In Hampshire, milk and cereals are in substantial surplus, so the Bill will be widely welcomed there.

Alternative or even additional activities in rural areas might include such things as tourism, with hotel accommodation and so on, and fish farming. In my constituency, we have two famous fish rivers — the Itchen and the Meon. Next door, in the part of my constituency that I lost in the boundary changes, is the river Test. That is of particular interest to the people in my constituency.

There are also opportunities for the direct marketing of farm products, particularly now that there is an accent upon health, natural foods and so on.

These opportunities, fit in very much with the Conservative philosophy on agriculture, of encouraging the British farmer to think beyond producing just for the farm gate, but of selling into the market. In the early 1980s we encountered problems with products such as apples and bacon, illustrating one fault in British agriculture, that our farmers had tended to grow for volume. The Milk Marketing Board and various other boards would buy the food in bulk. The farmer was not thinking of the end consumer; he was thinking of the wholesaler rather the retail consumer. There are still opportunities in that area for initiatives by farmers.

There are also opportunities in value-added products such as cream, cheese and meat products such as sausages and ham. Other opportunities were mentioned by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who spoke of recreation. In addition to activities such as nature walks, he mentioned sport and questioned whether any Government money, even indirectly, should be used to finance what he terms controversial sports, such as fox hunting and hare coursing.

In Committee, there must be major concentration on what might be considered controversial — in other words, when people exercise their freedom of choice — and on things that are legal or illegal. If sports such as fox hunting and shooting are legal, there is no problem. I noticed with interest that the hon. Gentleman excluded from his list another blood sport, fishing, which often allows an animal — the fish — to suffocate over many hours. I wondered why until I considered the voting profile of many people who fish. Then I began to see. The hon. Gentleman may — I do not say that he is — be interested not so much in the life of those animals as in his own votes. We must focus on that matter in Committee, if the hon. Gentleman tries to say that, as a legal sport is controversial and he does not support it, the Bill should not cover it.

There are also commercial opportunities, such as garden centres. Farmers might also be encouraged to enter taxi and lorry businesses. With their families, they could carry out activities not instead of, but in addition to, farming. For example, if they ran a lorry business, it could be in support of agriculture.

There are also tremendous opportunities for crafts and light industry. On high technology, a farmer's son and daughter might have gone through different schooling from the one that he enjoyed. Their education might be orientated towards a high technology future. They do not have to leave the farm and live in the city; they could live on the same farm and bring high technology to it.

For the rural areas to remain viable, we must accept that there has to be change. We must protect the environment, and we must maintain a serious grip on the green belt. At the same time, we must show imagination in adapting to the necessary changes. We must not restrict the evolution of life on the farm as the farmers grapple with the challenges of the changed use of land. We must show imagination and flexibility at the same time as retaining the overall goals of protecting the environment. I shall now deal with planning permission, especially on the part of local authorities. I believe that local councillors on planning committees and their staff must be made aware of the need for adaptation on the farms and the implication of the changes that are about to happen. It is our job to make sure that they are made aware. We must remind them that Conservative policy, even at this date, is to encourage the changed use of farm buildings.

The great advantages of high technology are that it is largely clean and non-pollutant. It does not have to be concentrated around coal or a certain market, distribution centre or labour. It can be well diversified into the country. In fact, a farm provides a good site. It has access for the odd van or lorry delivery, it has utilities and buildings. Some of the At cost barns are easily adapted to all sorts of uses on the inside. Of course, the farms are in the country, often in a fold in the ground out of the wind. Therefore, the conversion of a farm into a high technology site would have very little impact on the environment.

However, mistakes can be made and one nearly happened in my constituency. In the village of Kingsworthy the intention was to concentrate all the high technology of the area into one place and to build a huge high technology park that completely engulfed and dwarfed the local village and created its own environmental problems. It was being slipped through under the guise of high technology, when it was light industry. High technology does not require a major concentration. I urge local authority planning committees to look seriously at farms as a wonderful option for areas in which high technology can grow in a non-pollutant way.

For 20 years the Agricultural Training Board has offered a training service in Hampshire, often in conjunction with the county agricultural college at Sparsholt. It now offers over 1,100 courses. The grass-roots organisation in Hampshire is in the hands of eight agriculture and two horticulture training groups with over 30 per cent. of all Hampshire farmers and growers active at any one time. Therefore, there is real participation in Hampshire and I know that there will be great interest in this Bill.

The Bill will allow farmers not only to take courses in farm management, as they do now, but to take courses that will help them adopt new forms of land and asset use

to meet the challenges of the industry. It will also allow people from urban areas to become involved in activities in the country and it will encourage people back into the villages and restore vibrancy. It will provide opportunities for people in urban areas, especially deprived areas, to live in the country and play a full part in the country communities. It will encourage other bodies such as equestrian centres, local authorities and the National Trust to participate in the rejuvenation of rural areas more actively than at present.

As I have said, the Bill is self-financing and will contribute greatly to adapting and continuing country life. I offer it my full supprt and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North on his welcome initiative. I should like to wish him good luck in furthering the Bill through the processes of the House.

11.44 am

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I should like to add my congratulations to those already expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on taking the opportunity to bring forward his Bill to widen the powers of the Agricultural Training Board. If one comes high or at the top of the private Members' ballot, it is tempting to take some apparently sensational step that will leave the Member concerned covered in glory, or something else, for ever and a day. Therefore, to take a measure which is of such enormous importance but without instant box office appeal, shows responsibility for which my hon. Friend should be commended.

The fact that the Bill does not have immediate box office appeal does not in any way detract from the vital significance it has for the countryside. Hon. Members from both sides of the House have already picked up the significance of the changes happening today.

Twelve months ago we were involved in the early proceedings of what is now the Agriculture Act 1986 and we spent much time talking about rural diversification. We spent hours in Committee dealing with the fine points of the desirability of rural diversification and at the end of the procedures, the Act included a clause that enabled Ministers to be able to encourage rural diversification on a broader basis than had been envisaged when the Bill was first drafted. I was particularly grateful for that. However, at the moment Ministers do not have the ability to bring forward funds directly to be able to encourage that. We are not talking about funding today because the fact that the Bill is private Member's legislation means that there cannot be an extension of public expenditure involved. However, we are talking about broadening the base of opportunity for rural diversification and that is a good thing.

When looking at rural diversification we must deal with the question of training so that people can take advantage of the opportunities that are being presented and sought every day. The training facilities in my part of the world are already fairly good under the Agricultural Training Board and I am told that in my county there are already 17 training groups dealing with the training needs of agriculture and horticulture. Hon. Members do not need to be reminded of the importance of agriculture and horticulture to the county.

It is significant that, in the year ending 31 March 1987, the training groups will have held almost 500 short practical courses in a wide range of skills from craft level to management to meet—this is the important point—the locally identified needs of the members' businesses. It is a good thing that most of the courses are held on farms with the facilities provided by group members. Trainees learn by doing, and "hands on" practice under the supervision of skilled instructors and tutors is a good and effective way of using funds.

In addition to subjects primarily concerned with husbandry and production, there has been a recent surge of interest in courses designed to improve the financial and business management of farmers and growers. I cannot underline the importance of that point too strongly. Far too often over the years, that dimension has gone by default.

The industry's increase in coherence at present makes it imperative that everyone involved in agriculture and horticulture is as fully aware of the financial dimensions in operation as every other engineering or professional enterprise. They cannot afford to have any aspect of their enterprise financially unquantified at the moment.

I gather that horticulture businesses, which are of great significance in my part of the world, have taken advantage of a new series of Agricultural Training Board courses designed to prepare newly appointed supervisors for their responsibilities in the management of people and processes. That is welcome, because the margins of horticulture become ever less as the industry becomes more competitive and expert. However, significantly, it has been reported to me that it has not been possible, because of the present limitations of the Agricultural Training Board's scope, to respond to growing requests for training in woodland management, tourist and recreational developments and the valuable production of milk and meat products. Those areas particularly relate to rural diversification of the first order, not the rural diversification referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) but that first line of rural diversification in the countryside where it is clearly apparent to those involved with the countryside that they have an additional aspect of business which can be expanded.

I am told that there is also an unsatisfied demand for training in agricultural skills from individuals and organisations which manage land for purposes other than food production. The Bill will contribute enormously to the satisfaction of those demands that at present are unsatisfied. For that reason, it must be commended.

I want to take this opportunity to raise a particular point with the Minister which he may not necessarily be able to answer today. However, it is right that we should be aware of the difficulties that face tenants on agricultural holdings when they seek to diversify their businesses. That reflects very much on their willingness to take up training opportunities.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said that he hoped that no one would read the proceedings on this debate. I hope that they will be read by the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union, because there is a problem at the heart of this matter. Written into the model tenancy agreement, which is so often the foundation of the landlord-tenant agreement, is the provision that a tenant may not diversify or undertake business outside the narrow scope of agriculture without the agreement of the landlord. On the face of it, that may be a sensible provision. However, at

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the moment it means that many tenants are in contravention of their tenancy agreements if they carry out bed and breakfasting.

It has been brought to my attention by a constituent who sought to diversify his operation by creating a model farm specialising in rare breeds that his landlord immediately said that he wanted an enhanced rent or a share of the take. We are concerned with the unfettering of the tenant so that he may utilise his holding within a far wider scope of definition of agricultural or countryside activity so as to be able to pay the rent that he has agreed to pay in the light of his lessening ability to indulge in the full production for which the tenancy agreement was drawn up in the first place.

This point may not strictly be within the terms of the Bill, but it very much affects the ability or willingness of those in the countryside to take the training opportunities created under the Bill. That condition in model tenancies is a positive disincentive to training opportunities proposed in the Bill. I plead with those who are in a position to change matters to recognise that the current provisions of the model tenancy inhibit the future of rural diversification in the countryside. All landowners who operate under model tenancy agreements should desire a full and healthy scope of activity in the countryside.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North on having identified and laid on the table another piece in the jigsaw puzzle which is confronting agriculture and the countryside in shaping their future. That has been an invaluable contribution, for which he must be fully commended. I look forward to seeing the Bill progress through Committee and on to the statute book.

11.54 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on obtaining the Bill and on the first-class way in which he presented it. Normally, I would have noted what he said and skilfully woven his comments into my speech—

Mr. Home Robertson: Speech?

Mr. Thompson: Yes. — and everybody would have been satisfied. I must thank hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I know that some of them live in far corners of the United Kingdom, so I shall deal with my hon. Friend's comments first and then proceed to the more general aspects of the Bill and comments from Opposition Members.

As the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) lives furthest away and has important business in his constituency, I shall deal first with his comments. I thank him for welcoming the Bill and, indeed, for sponsoring it. I know that the Labour party is genuinely worried about diversification and I was surprised that he could not resist making a little dig at the Government. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman brought the support of agriculture workers, the Scottish farmers unions and Rural Forum, all of which will be of great benefit to my hon. Friend during the passage of the Bill.

I listened with interest to what the hon. Gentleman said about trees. We agree that trees will play a great part in the diversification programme to come, so any training given in the growing of trees will be for the better. I took his point about fox hunting and hare coursing. This Bill is no vehicle for any discord. Although some of my hon. Friends may disagree slightly, I do not want the Bill to include anything that could cause discord in future. We seem to have general agreement about that. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that, but not pleased to hear——

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister has no money.

Mr. Thompson: I need not continue. The hon. Gentleman asked questions to which he knew the answer and that is not within the rules of the House. There is no money, at this time and we shall have no money resolution on the Bill at present. We shall see how it goes, as Ministers say from this Dispatch Box.

We must diversify. As the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch)—he sends apologies for his absence—and my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) said, we are in the middle of an agricultural revolution. It started before the common agricultural policy started. During the past 25 years the United Kingdom has doubled its cereal production from 7 million to 15 million tonnes, its sugar beet production has risen 30 per cent., milk production 50 per cent., beef and veal production 50 per cent., mutton and lamb production 40 per cent., pig meat 140 per cent. and, most dramatic, there has been a tenfold increase in poultry production. All that has been achieved on a declining area of agricultural land.

Back in 1967, when I was a county councillor, people were talking about how awful it was to continue building because we would run out of land and would end up starving outside our houses. That has not happened. *[Interruption.]* There is no sign of that with me. One would not expect the Minister for Food to look as though he had never had a good meal in his life, and I do not intend to.

With that background, we are happy to welcome the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North gave a good outline of the Bill, and I am sure that he will endeavour to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a moment to wind up. He covered many of the matters that have since been covered. The Bill was well explained by him, and it was also explained that it will be self-funding.

The hon. Member for Ipswich sent me his apologies. He is another sponsor of the Bill. I agree with him that the Bill will lead to a ground change in agricultural training. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North mentioned their local training schemes, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) a moment ago. I am glad to add my congratulations to the training schemes going on in north Yorkshire, west Yorkshire and south Yorkshire. Those schemes seem to be successful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West had some hard things to say about planning. He made an important point about training people in the welfare of animals and how the Bill will extend people's awareness of the need properly to look after animals. The Government have set up the Farm Animals Welfare Council to guide them on the welfare of animals. We look forward to and often receive comments, upon which we often act, from organisations such as Compassion in

World Farming, the RSPCA and other welfare groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West and I shall have no truck whatsoever with the lunatic fringe. We shall encourage farmers and the farming community to see that such lunatics are caught and imprisoned with the full severity of the law.

I was a little disappointed by the sour reception of the Bill by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mrs. Shields). She comes from an area with almost no unemployment—3 per cent. or 4 per cent.—yet she, like many of her colleagues, would have us believe that the whole of the north of England is painted black. I am as lucky as she is to live in a most beautiful part of the country.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): It cannot be that beautiful—it is not in Lancashire.

Mr. Thompson: No, it is not in Lancashire, it is in Yorkshire. Conservative Members consider that small farmers—my constituency is made up of small farmers—are the backbone of the farming industry. The Bill will give a great deal of help to those small farmers who wish to take it.

It is not demeaning for a farmer's wife to put on bed and breakfast, as opposed to getting up early in the morning to feed the chickens or the calves. Perhaps the chickens and the calves have more interesting conversation, but it is a change of job. The farming community, and small farmers especially, will welcome the ability to move into training. I shall not deal with alliance farming policies, the Liberal farming policy for the north, the SDP farming policy for the south, or any of their multiplicity of policies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made a welcome wide-ranging contribution that has already been commented upon. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) made an interesting point about the Sherwood forest leisure park. Leisure parks were looked upon with fear only a few years ago, but now people all over the country are competing. Leisure parks and theme parks give a great deal of employment to people living in the surrounding countryside. I was glad to hear that my hon. Friend welcomed the leisure park in his constituency.

It was nice to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) talk so knowledgeably about farming. I have often been instructed by his speeches on finance in all its rarified aspects. Perhaps he is moving with the City into farming—a better bet, perhaps.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): He is diversifying.

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

I was pleased to hear what my hon. Friend said about anglers. Tomorrow night, I shall speak to anglers in Todmorden. Anglers are considered to be an integral important part of the sport and recreation community. My hon. Friend pointed out that there are more people involved in angling than in any other sport. Conservative Members have not forgotten the needs of anglers compared with the needs of those in many other sports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford made an expert contribution and saw the point of the Bill exactly. He added to the pleas of others on the need for trainers and training. He was right to mention the value of value-added products. About 46 per cent of the butter manufactured this year in the United Kingdom was immediately put into intervention butter. If it could have been put into cheese, yogurt or other value-added products, the whole of British farming industry would have been much more prosperous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford directed his last point specifically at me. It concerned diversification and the tenant and the landlord getting a fair crack of the whip. Harmonisation can only be achieved by those associations that deal with and look after tenants and landlords. I hope that they read *Hansard* carefully, as my hon. Friend requested.

I think that I have covered most of the points raised. Many hon. Members have referred to planning as important. It is often argued that the planning system prevents farmers from diversifying into other activities. The Government are sensitive to the needs of farmers seeking to diversify, and recent circular advice from the Department of the Environment to local planning authorities illustrates this. For example, circular 2/86 "Development by Small Businesses" draws together advice from previous circulars over the freeing of redundant farm buildings for other uses — for instance, small-scale commercial or industrial ventures to help diversify the rural economy, and also refers to the importance of leisure facilities in contributing to employment being underlined in a report "Pleasure, Leisure and Jobs, The Business of Tourism", which was published in July 1985. The point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West about the small business which tried to occupy the disused chapel on the edge of a village is covered by those references.

Green belt policy is often singled out as a particular constraint on farmers in those areas. The Government's policy on the development in green belts is set out in Department of the Environment circular 14/84, annex A, which says:

> "Inside a Green Belt, approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings for purposes other than agriculture, sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area".

Where planning permission is sought for new uses of redundant agricultural buildings, it is for the local planning authority to consider the application by reference to this policy and any other material consideration. But it would be appropriate to take into account, where material, the need to diversify the rural economy by encouraging new types of employment and enterprise. Redundant agricultural buildings can provide suitable accommodation for small firms or tourist activities, or can be used for individual residences, without detriment to the green belt and to the benefit of the local community, especially where the buildings are of attractive appearance and can be expected with normal repair and maintenance to last for many years. In deciding planning applications for new uses of redundant agricultural buildings, I would expect local authorities to have regard to these considerations.

It is not just in remote country areas where planning authorities seem to lose their way in these measures. We should encourage planning authorities, wherever possible, to diversify in an environmentally sensitive way. There is nothing the matter with that phrase. It means exactly what it says. We should do so in a way that everyone who wants enterprises established can accept. If that is done carefully and gently, without banner waving and silliness on either side, far more jobs will be created and people can use the provisions in the Bill widely.

[Mr. Thompson]

The Bill will involve all sorts of advisory services. The agencies include the Development Commission, the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the English Tourist Board, and the sports councils. All those bodies can give grants and offer advice on various aspects of diversification at local level. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food works closely with them. Some enterprising farmers have successfully expanded beyond traditional activities without financial help from outside. It is the Government's policy to provide incentives in the form of grants where they can be of most help. That is one reason why we do not need a money resolution for this Bill, because the money to do the job is already available in many cases from other areas.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my hon. Friend, who will be coming up to my constituency in Stafford shortly and will be discussing these questions with local farmers and others involved in the rural economy, agree that enterprise agencies also have an important role here in dovetailing with all the important bodies that he has just mentioned?

Mr. Thompson: I certainly agree that enterprise agencies do and should dovetail.

In commenting on the Bill, I have sketched over much that I have to say, as it has been said ably and wll by other Conservative Members today. This Bill will be welcomed not just by the Agricultural Training Board but by the agricultural industry and by many other interests that the Bill will enable the board to serve. On behalf of the Government, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North on bringing the Bill forward, and I commend it to the House.

12.15 pm

Mr. Neale: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to the debate.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for his kind remarks. There is a wide measure of agreement on what he said about planning. That applies to those who are involved in farming as well as to others in rural areas. Matters of the sort that we have been discussing should be dealt with in a way that is environmentally sensitive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) said, it is always a matter of balance. It is only when rigidity is applied by planning authorities that great upset can be caused.

An example arose recently in my constituency when a proposal was agreed by my parish council, the local people and the district council, but the county council found that a change of use on a farm which was well tucked away amounted to an infringement of the structure plan, and accordingly turned it down. That is an example of how a farmer's efforts to diversify were brought to naught.

I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have spoken so kindly about the Bill. It is clear that there is widespread agreement about the need to accept that there is difficulty in farming in rural areas. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Wertch) talked of the need for a farming and countryside policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West talked about a rural revival. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mrs. Shields) spoke of the trauma of some small farmers. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) spoke kindly of the Bill and talked about the social denuding that is taking place in rural areas because of changes in farming. These speeches are of common concern and will be confronted to some extent by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) introduced us to a considerable number of members of his own family: I confess that I rather lost count. He may have appeared to range slightly wide of the Bill, but one of the critical features which singles it out from many others of its kind is that it confronts the problem of farmers' family members and the wives of farm workers, who can participate so much in the diversification process. They too would be able to obtain some training under the Bill. That is most important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) — the hon. Gentleman was kind enough to tell me that he would be watching the clock carefully as he is due to attend a constituency engagement, and I suspect that many others are in that position— acknowledged the need to establish alternative skills and to encourage small farmers as well as those employed on small farms, and large farms, too, to take up the opportunities that would be open under the Bill. It was interesting to hear of the hon. Gentleman's participation in that process.

It is not the Bill's purpose to allow the board to duplicate other courses. The Bill is a sincere attempt to provide opportunities that will plug the gaps that now exist. In any event, it would be necessary for the board to seek approval for the various forces that it wishes to establish.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West hit the nail on the head when he said that there is a need to accept change. As the hon. Member for Cornwall, North, I have a warm regard for my hon. Friend, who has helped me over the years on agriculture matters. That is a fundamental aspect that affects agriculture at present, its need to accept change and face realities.

The hon. Member for Ryedale was somewhat critical of the Government, although she did say that the Bill would have alliance support, for which I am grateful. In my research and preparation concerning the Bill, I have not found one example to suggest that the Government have in any way been unaware of what has happened and unaware of the changes that must be faced in agriculture. I did not seen any sign of a lack of enthusiasm in terms of solutions to advance those changes.

After my discussions with members of the farming community, I suggest that we should not under-estimate their real desire to face the changes and their wish to seize the opportunities for training and help. For many, the changes have been traumatic. There has been a great deal of anxiety and apprehension when it has become apparent that the customs and ways of business which have been followed for generations are no longer relevant.

Although I have no illusions that the Bill will transform all British agriculture, I pick up the remarks kindly made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) and I hope that the Bill will contribute in some way to help the entire farming industry to cope with the

changes, diversify and improve itself on the foundation of the great successes which have already taken place since the war.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order, No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

AIDS (Control) Etc. Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.22 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move, That the bill be now read a Second time.

Parliament can be in no doubt about the threat of AIDS to our society. According to the December figures 610 AIDS cases had been registered in the United Kingdom, and about half those people had already died. When the Secretary of State for Social Services opened the AIDS debate on 21 November he estimated that there were about 30,000 HIV — human immune deficiency virus — carriers in the country. We know that the median time between becoming infected and developing AIDS is around five years, and according to latest estimates it is likely that about 40 per cent. of those infected with the virus will acquire AIDS within five years.

There is no cure for AIDS. Everyone who has the disease dies of it. It was first described only in 1981, and although a great deal has been learnt about it since then there is no good ground for believing that a cure will be discovered in the next few years.

Edinburgh is especially concerned about the disease. Although two thirds of the AIDS cases to which I referred occurred in the London area, hon. Members will be aware that in Edinburgh well over 50 per cent. of injecting drug misusers are HIV carriers. It is feared—I do not think there can be any doubt about it—that in a few years the percentage of the population who will develop AIDS in Edinburgh will be higher than in any other city in the United Kingdom.

We had a useful debate on 21 December, when the Government announced their public education campaign, which I support. I believe that the campaign, and the work of many broadcasters and journalists throughout the country, has helped to raise public awareness of this issue. It is vital that people should learn about the facts.

We have learnt a great deal about the disease. We know how it is transmitted. We know also that people understand the facts about the disease. If they respond to the guidance that they receive, they can reduce to a negligible level their chances of becoming infected. However, it has to be assumed that there will not be a cure for some considerable time. Even on the best assumptions about the efficacy of the Government's campaign and the response to it by society as a whole, this crisis will be with us until the end of the century. It is the biggest public health crisis for over half a century.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I strongly support the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on introducing it. However, in view of the speed of events, does he think that an annual report is sufficient?

Mr. Strang: I shall deal with that point when I turn to the provisions of the Bill.

If enacted, the Bill will make an important contribution to our fight against the disease. Other steps will have to be taken, and I have no doubt that they will be taken. In some respects the Bill will complement the work that the Government have already set in hand.

In response to the intervention of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), it might be helpful if I take hon. Members through the Bill. Clause 1 is the

[Mr. Strang]

substantive clause, and subsection (1) spells out the central purpose of the Bill. It lays a statutory duty on every district health authority in England and Wales, and on every health board in Scotland, to produce an annual report on AIDS. The first report will become available to Parliament on 1 February 1988. The statistical data will refer to the position at 30 November of the previous year. Therefore, the data included in the first published report will relate to what has happened up to 30 November 1987.

The Government will be obtaining data continuously and they may choose to ask for monthly or quarterly statistics. There is a very real case to be made for laying a statutory requirement on district health authorities to produce reports. However, it would be unwise to ask for more than one report each year. An annual report is the right approach for Parliament and the wider public, but the Government may choose to ask for more frequent reports from the district health authorities and health boards.

Subsection (2) sets out the prescribed form for each report. If the data from the reports can be collated, it will then be easy to compare the reports. Therefore, it is necessary to lay down a format that can be developed subsequently.

Clause 1(2) lays down the areas which the report should cover. Paragraphs *(a)* to *(e)* refer to the statistics in relation to 30 November of the previous year; that is, the number of sufferers, the percentage of the population, and the number of carriers. Those data are of great importance. There may be some scope for making adjustments to the precise nature of the data required, but it is vital that the figures should be available to Parliament for each district health authority and health board.

Paragraphs *(a)* to *(e)* relate to the past, and paragraph *(f)* asks the boards and authorities to estimate the number of persons who are likely either to become infected by the virus or to develop AIDS in the next 12 months. Paragraph *(g)* is important, because it is crucial that we recognise that this is a report not on what the authority has done, but on everything being done within the area of the authority in relation to AIDS. It will help to promote better co-ordination between the different agencies—the local authorities as well as the health authorities and voluntary bodies. It is vital that we have a report on treatment and counselling—counselling is important to the high-risk groups—those who become carriers and are known to be carriers, and, those who sadly, develop AIDS.

Paragraph *(h)* relates to the action taken not only by the authority or board, but by public agencies and voluntary organisations to control the spread of the virus. Paragraph *(i)* relates to education. This is important. I do not intend to criticise the Government's campaign—I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge this—but a media campaign can only be part of the process of education. It is important that we have an annual report on what is being done in the schools and elsewhere to educate people and give them the facts about the disease, thus enabling them to alter their lifestyles and reduce their chances of becoming infected. Paragraph *(j)* enables the Secretary of State to bring forward additional requirements for information in the report. This is the substantive clause.

Clauses 2 and 4 relate to Northern Ireland because the Bill will apply to England, Scotland and Wales.

Clause 3 contains a provision which may not be necessary. We may reach a judgment which accepts that there is not any significant net increase in public expenditure for the purposes of the Bill.

The Bill has broad professional support, including that of the British Medical Association. In practice, the work will be done by the AIDS co-ordinator and his staff, but I believe that the statutory requirement on the authorities and the boards to produce the first report by February 1988 will have the effect of galvanising them into action where this is needed. There is no question but that a range of organisations must become involved. The Government have an overriding responsibility, and local authorities have a major responsibility, but society as a whole has a responsibility and I hope that one effect of the Bill will be to help to galvanise the areas into action.

Secondly, there is no doubt that the Bill will provide a viable data base. I stress that it is essential that that data should be publicly available. In a sense, the nub of the Bill is that information will be published and made available to Members of Parliament, the local media and everyone else and it will be easy to collate. Indeed, one assumes that that will be done on a regional and national basis.

Thirdly—this comes up at conferences on the issue—different professionals would like to learn about what is happening in other areas. I shall not name the English authorities, but some are well up front and must be applauded for that. At least one is represented on the Conservative Benches today. But Edinburgh is well down the road in taking action, while other authorities have not yet started. The social work department is planning a hospice and all the work is well in hand. We shall, sadly, be hit within a year or so with perhaps up to 100 AIDS cases. There is a strong wish among professionals to learn more about what is happening in the different areas, and the reports will enable that to happen.

Fourthly, the Bill will achieve better co-ordination within the areas. The very fact that the report has to cover not just the authority but all the public agencies and voluntary organisations will enable that to happen. There will have to be good co-ordination. There is a great challenge to society in caring for the sufferers.

I was at a religious conference yesterday organised by Scottish Television, attended by people of all denominations, not just Christians, and there was a real recognition on the part of the Church leaders that the churches and everyone else could make a contribution to the work in the voluntary sector if they so wished. Parliament and the public will be better able to understand the scale of the problem as a result of the reports.

Sixthly, the Bill will be important for resource planning. In London, but also in Edinburgh and other parts of the country, decisions already have to be taken in relation to provisions for the sufferers of AIDS, and, of course, counselling.

Seventhly, and finally, as I have said, we shall be dealing with this problem for the rest of the century. The reports will help us to evaluate the success of society's efforts to combat the disease.

The Bill will make an important contribution to meeting the challenge of AIDS. This means that it will help us to reduce the rate of spread and to support the sufferers and their families.

12.38 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on having brought the Bill before the House and I am proud to have been associated with him as one of its sponsors. I understand that at this early stage in our coming to terms with this major epidemic, it is much better to advance steadily from a base of agreed knowledge than to panic and rush into extreme activity.

However, while I welcome the Bill, it is proper to say that in the comparatively short term it does not go far enough. I say that advisedly because the largest experience of the disease and unfortunately — or, in one sense, fortunately — its most dramatic incidence is overseas. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said that the hallmark of almost all the professionals operating in this area is that they are desperate to get as much information as they can from one another, whether they are within the boundaries of the United Kingdom or outside them.

Yesterday I went to my first meeting as a newly elected member of the council of the Save The Children Fund and was impressed to learn of the considerable co-operation between the international voluntary organisations dealing with AIDS, and of the sophistication of much of the thinking that they are putting in to their handling of the matter. Very real lessons can be learned for the collection of information for which the Bill is pressing. It is, for example, true to say that the Edinburgh office of the Save The Children Fund is co-ordinating the Save The Children Fund effort. One of the hallmarks of the large voluntary organisations is that all of them have seen the vital importance of informing their staff about the disease and how to handle it in their work. Many of those organisations are, of course, screening their volunteers and workers before they take up their posts abroad and have already developed an encouraging level of communication with their staff about the dangers of the disease.

I ask the Minister to assure the House that the Government are pressing upon firms that send people overseas the need to exercise the same amount of responsible communication with their staff that the international voluntary organisations seem to be able to do.

The scale of the disease has already been discussed in the House on several occasions and I shall not go into it in great detail. However, it is worth remembering that in Kinshasa alone about 45,000 cases have been confirmed out of a population of 3 million. That is a sizeable and terrifying figure. The World Health Organisation has pointed out that about 86,000 cases have already been notified from the Americas, the bulk of which come from the USA. Therefore, as we know, this is not a small matter.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): Like the hon. Gentleman, I am a supporter of the Bill and I have followed very closely and with great interest what he is saying. He said that he wished that the Bill went a bit further. A doctor of my acquaintance used those very words to me two or three days ago. I asked the doctor what he would like the Bill to contain that it does not contain already, and the chap could not answer the question. Therefore, I put it to the hon. Gentleman: what would he like to see in the Bill that is not there?

Mr. Rowe: I should like to see two things. First, I should like to see a statement about the extent to which health authorities are co-operating with and learning from international agencies, because that is something that they could usefully do. Secondly, I am not wholly satisfied that the Bill, as it stands, demands enough information about the progress of educational and counselling procedures. We could consider those two points with advantage later on.

It is interesting that people in the countries where there is much greater experience of the disease have learnt two things. First, in most of the countries where it is most obvious, it is transmitted principally by heterosexual rather than homosexual activity. That is a matter of enormous importance for the public in this country to understand. Secondly, those people have already learnt the lesson, which our medical people have not been slow to learn, that it is possible to sterilise equipment in ways that kill the disease, and it is possible for simple sterilisation and anti viral procedures to be operated. The virus cannot survive in temperatures much above 60 deg C. It is killed by household bleach. It cannot survive an attack by chlorine. Those are important matters, when people think of the disease as a monster about which one can do nothing of substance.

Already, in many parts of the world it is clear that if one could make absolutely certain that the blood used for transfusions and the blood products used in operations and for other purposes were properly sterile, one could give the spread of the disease a considerable check. Those are matters upon which we need to make as much progress as possible.

I should like to refer to the reaction at home to AIDS sufferers. Even if it is difficult to measure it in the information that will be required of health authorities, we should not lose sight of it. In the current issue of the *Community Care* magazine there is a horrifying story. A young man was arrested during an affray and cried out that he had AIDS. He was instantly treated as some sort of pariah and leper. It was a sorry saga of how the social work staff, the police and every one else reacted to him. I should hate to see that repeated on a wide scale.

We already know that some workers in the public health system, in the social service departments of some local authorities, and so on will not go into the house of someone who has been shown to have positive signs of AIDS in his blood — not even an AIDS case. That information should be treated with extreme confidentiality anyway. That shows the desperate need for much better information and education for those who are naturally anxious not to catch the disease while serving the public in the way in which they have been recruited to do.

That raises the matter of who make the most appropriate counsellors for those who are known to have the disease or to be at risk. There is a strong case for saying that some counsellors, particularly people disseminating information and education to young people, should themselves be young people. I have dealings with a voluntary organisation that is anxious to be allowed to put its long experience of using young people to educate young people to work, in producing a breed of AIDS counsellors who will be able to go round schools and youth clubs and talk, as contemporaries, to people at risk about the ways in which to avoid the disease. In some cases they might go further than that and offer counselling to those who have contracted it. Any reports produced by the health authorities could give some suggestion of the scale of that sort of work.

[Mr. Rowe]

I believe that we are going seriously wrong in Britain in our debate about sexuality and people's personal sexual lives. Those local authorities—I am not as trenchant in my criticism of them as some of my colleagues—which advertise for lesbians to work in particular areas have got the wrong end of the stick. People's sexual lives are a private matter and it becomes a matter of public interest or of concern to a wider group than the individual and their immediate family only if, in some way or another, they are wrongfully involving other people in it. It is of no importance whether a school teacher is homosexually inclined as long as the children in his care have no reason to know that and no reason to feel threatened by it.

The same is true of heterosexual activity. It does not matter how people express themselves heterosexually in the privacy of their own homes with consenting partners. It matters only if it seems to interfere with the way in which they do their work and the relationships they have with people in their care. If we could get back to an understanding of that I believe that we would considerably diminish the very real danger that I perceive, which is that people who are known, by whatever mechanism, to have AIDS will be victimised.

I am prepared to bet that many people who are diagnosed as having positive indications in the blood will, in the initial horror of the revelation, be far too free in telling people about it. It is a human reaction to share it with everyone and news will get around. Those people will be shunned, ignored and ill treated by our society unless we have a much more balanced view of the causes of AIDS. After all, there will be many more people in a few years who could not conceivably have contracted the disease through immoral or improper practices. They may contract it by being married to someone who did not even know they had it when they got married. Therefore, it will be improper to discriminate against them or to stigmatise them.

It is important that there should be good education about how the disease is contracted. There should be good counselling for everybody about how to handle people who have the disease and, above all, there should be a much clearer understanding that people's private sexual lives are their own concern, unless and until they interfere with or threaten someone outside. For those reasons, I believe that the more information we can have on this epidemic the better it will be..I welcome the Bill.

12.53 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I welcome the constructive and useful Bill that has been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang). It seems to initiate some sort of long-term strategy for combating AIDS. Clearly, it is a modest Bill, but it is a measure that will be of long-term practical use to Parliament and hopefully, and more importantly in many ways, to the people who have to tackle AIDS at local level — such as those who are in daily contact with the disease.

When I first read the Bill my immediate reaction was, "What does it do?" It is very modest in its language. When I read it, I thought, "Where are the references to screening, needles and — dare I say it — to condoms?" My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East was right to leave out those complex problems and to tackle this specific part of the question.

I have very positive views about what action the Government should be taking to tackle the wider question. The Select Committee on Social Services is currently considering these issues and I am sure that all hon. Members look forward to an early and clear response from that Committee.

The Bill recognises the clear splits that exist between the Government and the "experts". It recognises the division and the impossibility of a private Member introducing legislation that would take into account all the various aspects of this terrible problem which presents moral dilemmas for the Government and society. The Bill introduces measures to which certainly no one could possibly object. These measures should have been in practice for a number of years, if only we had woken up to the problem earlier.

I note that the Bill provides that the report which each district health authority will have to produce will be in a "prescribed form". That means that the figures that will be produced will be based on standard criteria throughout Britain. That will provide more accurate statistics than any that exist now. However, there is no point in producing statistics for the sake of it. The figures of cases of AIDS and HIV carriers will allow a targeting of funds to cope with the disease which is not possible at the moment. I am aware that the Secretary of State has now received proposals from district health authorities in that area. The Bill will make that process much easier and more accurate for all concerned.

The very fact that district health authorities will have to produce a report will galvanise those more reluctant authorities into action over AIDS. I am sure that hon. Members will recognise that in some areas the reaction is still, "It can't happen here," or, "Even if it does happen here, it cannot affect us." We have a duty in Parliament to explain to people that this is not a problem which unfortunately affects a small number of people or one group of people. It can affect everyone.

Obviously, some areas have already had more experience than others in dealing with AIDS. The cumulative figures for the total number of AIDS cases until the end of December 1986, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East said, show that, of the 610 cases in the United Kingdom, the North West Thames regional health authority has 302 and altogether, London has 473 cases. However, there are just two cases in Northern Ireland.

The Bill will facilitate the process whereby authorities in Northern Ireland would be able to gain easy access to the experience of, for example, the North West Thames regional health authority or any other area and learn from its success or failure. The report would also show those areas without a large number of AIDS cases at present, but which are expecting what might almost be called an explosion of cases in the next 12 months. In that respect, I can mention Edinburgh. I do not recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East referred to this point, but there was an explosion in Edinburgh in the 1970s of hepatitis B, which caused many problems. There are parallels with AIDS, but only in the sense that it came about through drug injection. We must look at the

experience and knowledge that Edinburgh gained from that, which I am sure it will be only too willing to pass on to district health authorities.

Clause 1(2)*(j)* allows the Secretary of State to add to the Bill any extra provision which he feels is necessary and I hope that he will bear in mind how the disease affects women. The history of AIDS in England and Wales is closely identified with gay men. Indeed, the less informed, and perhaps more reactionary, among us liked to refer to it as the "gay plague".

Mr. Mikardo: Some still do.

Ms. Richardson: Indeed, some still do.

However, that is not the case in Scotland or other parts of the world. AIDS is not a gay disease, never has been and never will be. It spread among the gay community in London mainly because it was introduced there. In the United States of America it spread from San Francisco, where there is a greater concentration of gay men, to the rest of the country.

The repression and, often, discrimination of gay people sometimes brings pressures which result in their having a high number of sexual partners. The experience in Scotland is that the AIDS virus, HIV, is transmitted mainly among those who inject drugs. In other words, AIDS is transmitted completely differently. Those people account for over 60 per cent. of all those who are HIV-positive in Scotland. However, in England and Wales, 97 per cent. of HIV carriers are men who have contracted the disease from sexual contact. In Africa, most HIV infection is transmitted heterosexually and almost as many women as men are sufferers.

Unfortunately, women will account for an increasing proportion of the total number of AIDS and HIV cases in Britain. I must add that it is also unfortunate for men. Already one third of the HIV-positive drug injecters in Scotland are women. In that context I was worried to read the Office of Health Economics' booklet which forecast the AIDS virus. It showed rising intravenous drug abuse among young women. Their number increased by more than a third between 1982 and 1984. The problem is further compounded by the necessity of many drug addicts to turn to prostitution to finance the habit. In heterosexual intercourse, women are more likely to get AIDS from a man than to give it to a man.

Pregnancy throws up a twofold problem for mother and baby. At present we are not sure why some people with HIV develop AIDS and others do not. It has something to do with the state of a person's health and especially with the state of the immune system. The immense suppression of the immune system during pregnancy almost certainly increases the chances of an HIV mother developing AIDS.

The other side of the coin is the danger to the foetus. The virus can be transmitted to the foetus through the mother's blood or to the baby through her milk. Statistics show that there is a 50:50 chance of an HIV mother giving birth to an HIV child. Clearly, that raises all sorts of issues, ranging from the need for better advice, contraception and abortion facilities to much more freely available screening for those wishing to have a baby and the use of condoms to prevent cervical cancer.

The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) touched on the question of confidentiality. Bisexual and heterosexual men and women who have more than one partner will clearly be at risk from the disease. We must think with the greatest care how, without breaking confidentiality, we can try to counsel people that they must tell each other, and that they do not have to risk passing on the virus simply because they have more than one partner. They are placed in a dilemma. It will need careful thought to determine how that counselling may be done without breaking confidentiality, or, indeed, breaking a relationship between a man and a woman.

Mr. Rowe: Does the hon. Lady also not agree—she made this extremely important point—that the ease with which it will be possible to counsel people to share this information will depend substantially on the progress that we manage to make in preventing the community from stigmatising people who are known to carry the virus?

Ms. Richards: Absolutely. We have made a small amount of progress in that respect, but it is only small. There is beginning to be a slight change of attitude in the public mind. There will be phases. In the first phase, they do not wish to know; in the second phase they do not wish to have anything to do with anybody who has had anything to do with it; in the third phase they do not come to terms with it. It will be difficult for anybody to come to terms with the problem in that sense. We must develop our attitudes and work out carefully and closely how we do it. Certainly, we must not allow people who are unfortunate enough to contract the disease to be stigmatised in any way.

Having made those few remarks and having pointed to some of the problems that are not tackled by the Bill, I welcome my hon. Friend's attempt to make some progress. I do not suggest that the problems that I have outlined are suitable to be included in a private Member's Bill. My hon. Friend's Bill will pave the way for proper statistical information to be collected on an even basis throughout the country to give us, the Government and society a much clearer idea of what is happening and of what can perhaps be done in the future to help in this dreadful situation.

1.7 pm

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): When we last debated the AIDS problem, I commented on the high level of the debate, the seriousness with which it was treated and the universal acceptance of the problem, with no party differences expressed. Already, we have had the same experience today. This is not a party matter; it is a serious national problem. After considering the Bill, I decided that it was necessary. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on having brought it before the House as a private Member's Bill.

It is rather odd that a problem as serious as AIDS—a new disease spreading in this country and in the rest of the world—should be tackled by a private Member's Bill. I hasten to say to my hon. Friend the Minister that this is no criticism of the Government. It represents many hon. Member's awareness of the seriousness of the matter. We all wish to do something about it.

In health debates, it is proper that I declare that I have an interest. I am a member of the Medical Research Council and a director of a pharmaceutical company. I do not seek to draw on any of that expertise, as I did when I spoke in the last AIDS debate. I wish to speak to the Bill. The Bill is not so much about whether sufficient research has been carried out to find a cure or a vaccine for HIV

[Mr. David Crouch]

—for AIDS—as about work in health authorities, social services, in voluntary bodies, in the home and in society. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the fact that he has brought forward the important point that we need to tackle the problem and obtain information about it.

Why is the Bill necessary? We are facing the beginning of an epidemic. We need more information so that we can properly assess the scale of the problem and find out where it is concentrated, where it is developing and where the danger spots are. Hon Members have said that the disease is developing in some areas—for example, among drug users in Edinburgh — but is spreading more rapidly among the gay community in London. We need to determine where the growth points are and the cause of the growth. We need to find out where the disease might spread.

We do not have as much experience of this disease as we do of others. We do not need to have a special debate if there is an outbreak of diseases known to the World Health Organisation, the Department of Health and Social Security and the Government. There are set plans for coping with those diseases and they are immediately put into action. With this disease, we are at the beginning of an epidemic and we do not know enough. The Bill will help us to find out much more.

Mr. Mikardo: I am very interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the value of obtaining information about what is happening with AIDS. Perhaps it would be worth considering in Committee whether the statistics that are requested under paragraphs *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)*, *(d)* and *(e)* should be subdivided according to sex, age, drug use and—although I am a little more doubtful about this—marital status.

Mr. Crouch: If we were considering an illness and we knew its varieties and degrees, there might have been a series of schedules to the Bill prescribing the categories to which the hon. Gentleman referred, so that they were all considered in detail. Bills with nothing to do with health contain schedule after schedule which dot every i and cross every t. I am sure that that point can be picked up in Committee.

This is a time for planning, not for panic. We can only plan and mobilise our resources — money, medical resources and social and voluntary work—if we know what we are up against. Those plans must be approved by Parliament, so we have a Bill. It is right that we should have legislation.

We must ensure that the right actions and the right amount of action are taken to prevent the spread of the disease—for example, by education and by advertising, which in a way resulted from our previous debate, not only in its present form on television and radio and in the press but by seminars for those in danger, such as drug users and young people. We must talk in the right areas in the right language. We must go out into the field with the right people to communicate, not preach—in other words, to educate.

We must take the right action in not only medical but caring treatment. Are we sure yet that we know enough about how to care for AIDS sufferers? My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) properly referred to the need not to stigmatise people who suffer from that disease. Why should we stigmatise anyone for any disease, no matter how they have caught it? To suffer from that disease is to suffer from a physical ailment and to suffer shame, remorse and regret. Those people need care and concern from those who look after them. They need not only medical care but care in the sense that I am trying to describe.

In terms of the resources we are considering, we shall need to find not only hospital beds but hospice beds, facilities for treatment at home, out-patient care, training of social workers and encouragement of the voluntary bodies, some of which already exist. I pay tribute to the Terrence Higgins Trust, which has achieved miracles in its work so far on a minimum budget. It is helped, of course, by the Government and I congratulate the Government on that. The trust has achieved a great deal but we need more of such knowledgeable, voluntary and helpful work.

Ms. Richardson: I have followed the hon. Gentleman's arguments carefully. I agree with the tribute he paid—to which I add my own voice—to the voluntary bodies, but we must balance their contributions with care in the community into which money is put by local authorities, or the district health authorities. I would hate to think —I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not implying—that the voluntary agencies could become in caring terms the substitute for the resources that should be put in by the Government or local authorities.

Mr. Crouch: I did not mean to imply that. I did not wish to neglect to refer to the great work already done in the first few years of this epidemic by the voluntary bodies.

I shall continue to develop my point that the data we seek to collect by this Bill to produce action must result in a combination of Government action through the health authorities and the social service departments and embrace the voluntary work in the hospice and counselling movements.

Ms. Richardson: Or just in the families.

Mr. Crouch: And in the family. I was going to mention that that was another important area where we want to ensure that we have enough resources for counselling as well as just for caring for sufferers and providing medical help to those who are in the final stages of the illness. Counselling is needed much earlier. Counselling is necessary when someone asks to be screened and then learns that he carries the HIV virus. Such a person urgently needs well trained counselling.

That is a serious dilemma. Such people have volunteered to come forward and find to their dismay that they are carrying the virus. At that stage, they will need to be counselled and trained people will be needed to do it. We need to be sure from Government and from the Department that an understanding of how that counselling should be done is passed on regionally and in districts so that it becomes a specialisation and a professional approach is adopted to a serious matter. We must ensure that we do not neglect that.

In the Bill we call for support for the health authorities. They are always under pressure for money, as we have heard endlessly during health debates, but now they are under pressure for yet more money to be spent on providing adequate medical provision in hospitals—out-patient treatment and other hospital departments. The general practitioners may need much more training on AIDS. Hospital authorities must consider whether they

can provide the beds, the trained persons and all the other facilities that are necessary. They will have to train their staff in the special preventive measures that are necessary in treating AIDS patients so that the staff can treat them with confidence and not feel fearful of doing so. All this requires a great deal of attention from the centre, and it is so proper that we are reminding the Government today of that need.

We should be calling on all social service departments to consider their approach to the problem. As the House knows, I served for 15 years on the South East Thames health authority, and in October 1986 I received a copy of "The Fight against AIDS". Action has been taken by that health authority. The document is extremely good and I cannot fault it. It is a complete study of the problem that we are considering. The only omission is a recommendation that there should be an annual report, but there is a requirement that all the districts under the authority should consider the problems. All the issues that have to be considered are listed, but there is no call for an anual report. That is a minor omission, because such a report would come forward in the normal course of events: all districts have to report to their regions and the regions report to the Secretary of State.

I am glad to report that one region with which I am familiar—it covers my constituency—has already taken action. I imagine that similar reports have come forward already from all the regions. I should like an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister for Health when he intervenes that there has been a similarly good response from health authorities generally in facing the problem.

I have mentioned the important work of the social services and have said that they should study the problem that is presented by AIDS. I have mentioned also the voluntary bodies. It is clear that co-ordination is important. We shall receive information and we shall have a measure of the danger of a spreading epidemic. We shall have a measure also of our resources, and information will be provided by the various statutory bodies on the danger that is coming forward, but we shall need to co-ordinate. There must be co-ordination between health and social services, voluntary bodies and the Departments. There is a case for the Government to set up a war cabinet or a crisis centre.

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of a proposal that was made in a paper that was sent to him recently by a friend of mine, the former director of social services in Kent, Mr. Nicholas Stacey. The paper is not confidential and it contains the proposal that there should be a national AIDS council. I have read the paper and have studied it carefully, and I believe there is much to commend the idea of establishing such a council. The council should be a blend of health workers, health officials, social service officials, voluntary officials and others. I do not have in mind a council of Cabinet Ministers. The council should have the authority to call on the resources that are required and ensure that they are deployed on a district and regional basis to meet the task of fighting a spreading disease.

There is a tendency already to preach about AIDS, and it is one which I condemn. That is not the way to face the danger of a health war. Our problem is to beat the danger. There is a tendency also to think, "I'm all right, Jack." That is something to which the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) referred. Another tendency is to think, "It's not for me, so I do not need to bother." Finally, there is a tendency to think that AIDS will go away, that people will change their habits or even, after the current advertising campaign, stick to one partner and use a condom. It is thought by some that drug users will use only clean needles and not share them. It is argued that that will take care of the problem, and that if they do not follow those practices it is their lookout. That is not the way to consider this problem. however, if they do not, AIDS sufferers will be like so many other people who do not take advice—those who continue to smoke cigarettes when the Government have advised them not to, those who do not use their seat belts against Government law. One cannot stop the rugged individualism of the British or indeed any people.

We must approach the problem and deal with this epidemic by taking note of what is in the Bill. We must get the facts and the figures and marshal our resources in a proper way. In this country we are in danger of whistling in the dark. The Government have taken action through advertising—that I commend—but we must not think that that is enough.

I wonder what the Secretary of State thinks after his recent and I am sure revealing visit to San Francisco. I would like to know his feelings about the importance of care in the community — I am sure that that was revealed to him in San Francisco where such community care, as opposed to hospital treatment, is important. How many days does an AIDS victim stay in hospital in San Francisco? I understand that many AIDS sufferers stay in hospital in San Francisco for only 11 days but that in New York they stay for 65 days. Why is there such a difference? Is there no co-ordination of treatment patterns in the United States? The average length of stay in St Thomas's or in the Middlesex hospital is between 17 and 18 days. That does not mean that that is the end of the treatment for the AIDS sufferer; it means that hospitalisation is not the only answer. Clearly, community care has an important part to play and we need to know Government views on developing that care.

To control this epidemic, we must remove the danger, assemble the facts and be aware of the size of the problem. In New York, for example, 30 per cent. of new AIDS cases are intravenous drug users and there are not so many from the gay community, but again the situation is different in San Francisco.

The proper strategy to prevent the spread of AIDS should be based on education and advertising. However, it is important that Government advertising must appear to be an important message and not, as it was delivered to me, wrapped up with a lot of junk mail on double glazing. That was the Post Office's fault and I have written to the Minister to draw his attention to that problem. A number of my constituents were delivered this important pamphlet wrapped up in an elastic band with double glazing advertisements, direct mail advertisements and so on. That was done by the Post Office and it was a great pity. The AIDS message is important and we must try to avoid mixing it up with the wrong sort of advertising.

We want, by correct personal and medical practices, to prevent the spread of AIDS. Here I come to a contentious issue. We must not neglect the question of blood transfusions. Recently there has been an argument between the British Medical Association and the Department about this matter. It is understandable that there should be an argument, because once two or three medical men are gathered together there will be two or

[Mr. Crouch]

three different views. In the end, the problem was sorted out and the Department and the BMA issued a joint statement.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I hesitate to interrupt but I wish to make it absolutely clear that it was not simply an argument between the BMA and the Government — there was a good deal of disagreement within the BMA and it is important that that should be understood.

Mr. Crouch: I entirely agree. I have read the report of that BMA meeting and Sir Christopher Booth, president of the BMA, utterly condemned the scare caused by the statement issued by one speaker.

I raise the question of blood transfusions only because I think that we ought to consider what is called autologous blood transfusion. In the *British Medical Journal* there is a leading article on the need for autologous blood transfusion.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Crouch: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not allow him to intervene at this stage. Before he does so, I should like to read what is said in this article, which appeared in the *British Medical Journal* on Saturday 17 January 1987.

Referring to the discussion on blood transfusion the article says:

"It will also encourage further consideration of collecting the patient's own blood before an elective operation and then transfusing it into him during the operation if necessary".

Then there is a quotation from a report by the Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre. It says:

"Although all blood donations in developed countries are now tested for antibodies to HIV, concern remains that some donations may transmit the virus.

Having acquired the virus, a person may take three to six months to develop the marker antibody, and the virus's remarkable capacity for antigenic change may make the antibodies evoked undetectable by conventional testing."

The article then says:

"As the virus spreads into the general hetrosexual community, asking male homosexuals, drug addicts, prostitutes, and their partners to refrain from donation becomes less helpful, as even the traditionally safe volunteer donor may be affected. So far, 65 positive donations have been detected in Britain."

It is no good ducking facts. The article then says:

"Autologous transfusion eliminates these risks of serious infection and also avoids sensitisation to red cell, white cell, and platelet antigens in donor blood".

Autologous blood transfusions are not accepted in many parts of the medical profession. The article also says:

"Autologous transfusion programmes have been used successfully in orthopaedic surgery, including paediatric cases, cardiothoracic and general surgery, and urological and head and neck surgery. It has also been used for women undergoing caesarian section. As many as 55 per cent. of elective surgical operations could be performed using autologous blood—that is, about a quarter of all surgical operations."

I read that article with interest. It should prompt further consideration of the use of a persons's own blood in transfusions where that is thought medically possible and is agreed by the patient.

We must care for AIDS patients in hospitals, in hospices, at home and in society. If we can marshal our resources and ensure that they are used correctly, and if we do not neglect the enormous importance of social care, we shall go a long way towards overcoming this problem. The epidemic must be conquered by these means. We must pull out every stop in international medical research to find the vaccine to bring that about.

1.33 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) for choosing this subject for his private Member's Bill. The contributions to the debate so far show how welcome is his initiative. We are all aware that the city of Edinburgh needs particular attention and help to deal with what the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) described as an aspect of the AIDS problem that is peculiar to Edinburgh because of its size and expansiveness. It is a commonly known fact that Edinburgh, probably more than any other United Kingdom city, suffers from drug-related AIDS.

I was not in the House on 21 November, nine weeks ago today, when the House spent the whole of a Friday debating AIDS. It was clear from the reports and from *Hansard* that that was a highly responsible and well respected and reported debate which demonstrated the general concern for urgent action.

In the nine weeks between the debate on 21 November and today, statistics—which appear to be accepted—show that over 3,000 additional people will have been infected with the virus. It is that sort of statistic that should reach home to people up and down the land. It is the sort of statistic that was rightly quoted and publicised by the Secretary of State at the beginning of the month when he introduced his publicity campaign, warning people, as he is bound to do, that about 4,000 people in Britain will die of AIDS in the next three years. The Institute of Medical Laboratory Sciences says that the number of cases of those infected with the virus is likely to double every 10 months.

Every opportunity must be taken to warn, advise, inform and assist people. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that soon after that general debate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has introduced his Bill, which, I expect, will receive its Second Reading today, go into Committee and soon be law. The hon. Gentleman intends that the first report of each district health authoity and board will be forthcoming in a year's time from now, with exactly the sort of information that each health authority should be seeking and providing.

Today's debate is also appropriate because of all the parallel events connected with AIDS that have been striking the public consciousness this week. The advertising campaign is well under way on the hoardings, and in the past few days the public have received—mine arrived a couple of days ago — the leaflet from the Department of Health that was published for each household. I say to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) that my leaflet arrived separately from the rest of the post, and I agree that it is important that the leaflet is brought to the attention of people.

It may be that another leaflet will be required quite soon particularly for places such as London, where there are many people in multiple occupancy dwellings and other housing, who are difficult to reach with any literature. We have seen the advertising posters and leaflets, the launch of the Government's publicity campaign and the welcome visit of the Secretary of State

to the United States, which has been well reported in Britain. The initiatives there will help considerably to show the Minister and his Department what they should be doing, and television coverage of the visit will make even more people aware of the issue.

We have seen the opening of the first AIDS wards in London, with the welcome blessing and endorsement by the royal family and others. The Middlesex hospital has added to the clear lead which it, with St. Mary's and St. Stephen's hospitals, has given. They are determined to break through the prejudices and show that they have a duty to treat, support and help people who are victims of this illness. At 11.30 this morning BBC Radio 4's "International Assignment" programme was dedicated to reporting the comparative figures on AIDS as it affects the different continents, not just ourselves.

In spite of all these opportunities, as other Members have made clear, the message does not necessarily reach home, and I say that with an admission. Ten days ago, or thereabouts, I was appointed to the job of spokesman on health for the alliance parties. In all honesty, I had not until then addressed myself in detail to the issue of AIDS in the way that I now have to do. I am sure that there are many like myself, who are not entirely unintelligent and who are fairly aware of what is going on, but who do not think that they need to be particularly informed about AIDS. They see the advertisements, register the problem, are aware of the clichéd responses and then say, "But it is not affecting me."

Most people in Britain, like me, will not yet know of anybody who is carrying the virus or dying from the disease. I am not aware of anybody whom I know within either of those categories, and most people would be in the same position. Therefore, one feels protected. Much more work needs to be done.

The clear horror of the disease is that it strikes down the healthiest people in the prime of life. It is most likely to affect not the elderly but the relatively young or the young middle-aged. Therefore, we must think about how we can do much more.

One person in a thousand in Britain is now estimated to be a carrier of the virus. That is at least one or two Members of the two Houses of Parliament, let alone the staff and all who visit. Such statistics need to register with people so that they begin to think that the disease does affect them and they must respond.

As the Secretary of State rightly said, public information is the only vaccine that we have. We must think of ways in which to make that the most effective vaccine. I congratulate the Government on what they have done. Once they got off the mark they responded, and quickly. I am prepared to accept that they may now be accelerating in the outside lane compared with other countries and their Governments. I applaud that and I encourage them to do more—to allow health authorities to spend the money necessary and to support the voluntary agencies which are doing, and are willing to do, the work.

The Department's initiatives are welcome and are complemented by the proposals in the Bill that the health authorities should do the same, which is equally welcome. I am in the same regional health authority area as the hon. Member for Canterbury and the consultative and later final document produced by the South-East Thames regional health authority is excellent. I think that it was produced in advance of that of any other region, but I stand to be corrected on that. That is exactly the sort of work that needs to be done urgently. There should be a set of recommendations that can then be implemented and monitored. I congratulate my regional health authority, as I have done in writing long before today's debate.

Clearly, the Bill is welcome, not only because it will enable and require that that be done, but because, as the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) rightly said, it will look at the other side of the coin, which is the need to be informed about what we are doing to care for the victims. There are horrendous phsychological problems for someone confronted with the diagnosis that he or she is a carrier. The hospice movement is not yet geared to cater for AIDS victims, but it could be, and is willing to be. People in the medical profession are willing to do a lot of work and to adapt their own professional careers to respond because their duty is one of service.

The double responsibility for information and medical knowledge—facts and figures—and to ensure that we have a network of care, is contained in the Bill. It is supported by both sides of the House and by my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who has been much involved in this issue over recent months.

I should like at this point briefly to pay tribute to my hon. Friend. When someone is reshuffled and disappears to take a different parliamentary responsibility overnight, he has to take up his new responsibilities and not continue with what he was doing. Up to 21 November 1986 my hon. Friend had asked more than 50 parliamentary questions on AIDS. That is five times more—I do not say this in criticism, but just to enhance my hon. Friend's reputation—than the Labour Front Bench asked over the same period. He clearly led the campaign for information in the House, quite properly and responsibly. I pay tribute to his foresight and keenness, which perhaps has something to do with his constituency being near to Edinburgh on the one hand and being a pharmacist on the other. He also had two very good and committed research assistants, who made sure that he was always up to the mark.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): One of the things that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did not do was to try to score petty party points about who had asked the most parliamentary questions. He tried to approach the topic in a multi-partisan spirit. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that a solution to the problem is to ask more questions than any other hon. Member, he is sadly mistaken and is setting the limits far too low.

Mr. Hughes: I shall come back to that in a moment. I am more concerned about some of the answers that the Minister has not given us than about the questions. I shall not let him off the hook, and hope that he will be able to enlighten us shortly.

Those of us in political parties also have a responsibility to make sure that our parties address the AIDS issue and commit, through our membership, the political emphasis to make sure that necessary work is done in community health councils, district health authorities and so on. I am glad to say that at my party's council meeting in Bristol in November last year we did just that. I think I am right in saying that we became the first party to adopt a widespread and far-reaching policy on this subject.

[Mr. Hughes]

Finally, I should like to ask the Minister some questions about what is being done. As I have suggested, there may need to be additional money for certain of the voluntary organisations. Will it be found?

I understand that the needle exchange scheme which operates in 12 cities is still a pilot scheme. I do not know what will be required to take it from being a pilot scheme to being a scheme available wherever it is wanted locally. However, I hope that if there is any local pressure for the scheme to be available in any other town, city or health authority area, the Department will permit that. I am entirely persuaded that it is right to have a one-for-one needle exchange scheme, and we should not moralise about that. It is better that we deal first with getting rid of the infected needle and separately start trying to deal with the drugs problem that faces those people.

I have seen the television advertisement only once, but I must advise the Minister that I am not certain that it is as effective as the literature, for those who read the literature. When I saw the television advert my reaction was that it generates fear and does not convey much information. That is a mistake. I understand the desire to make sure that people register that the advert is there. However, what people desperately need is information.

At the end of the last year I went to speak to a London sixth form. After lunch some of the sixth form students came back to the House to watch a debate from the Gallery. Four or five of them drove back with me and between them AIDS came up as a topic of conversation — sexual topics are often likely to be topics of conversation among teenagers——

Mr. Tony Banks: And among older people.

Mr. Hughes: Indeed. It was a very clichéd conversation —AIDS, reaction, condoms. The conversation was not developed intelligently.

It led me to fear that the advertising campaign is doing two things. First, it is over-simplifying the message, which may be necessary in the first stage, but we should go beyond that. Secondly, it is likely to generate fear rather than information. The Family Planning Association has written to me and, I imagine, to other hon. Members. If one is to discuss how condoms can be helpful, it is important to stress how to use them effectively. The FPA has given me to understand that a badly used condom will be inadequate and that not all condoms are up to the task. That information is important, especially to youngsters, many of whom will have sexual relationships at an early stage.

It is also important to tell people, and to reassure them about how they will not contract AIDS, otherwise the minority groups, which are likely to be the most frequent victims, are likely to suffer from greater isolation and being spurned by others, and alienation will result.

The other day the Secretary of State went to visit and meet AIDS victims in the States. He did what my predecessor, as Liberal party health spokesman my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire did here in London in the autumn, when he went to visit someone at St. Mary's hospital. The AIDS patient whom my hon. Friend met was resigned to his position. He was not bitter. He knew that he would die in a year's time. He was full of praise for his medical treatment and had been able to have a reconciliation with his brother. However —and the hon. Member for Mid-Kent made this exact point—the one thing that he was frightened of was the reaction of the community when he went home. He had a great fear of being taken home and regarded as a leper in the community. The myth that the handshake, the contact, the hug or even nearness to someone is sufficient for a person to contract AIDS has to be one of the main targets of the Government's information activities. It appears still to be a mythology, but it is the most dangerous and hurtful mythology for the victim——

Mr. Mikardo: Fostered by some newspapers.

Mr. Hughes: And indeed it is fostered by many newspapers on a regular basis. I do not know whether the Department has done so, but it could call in the newspaper editors and tell them to get their facts right. That would be helpful. We should see whether they responded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and the hon. Members for Gower (Mr. Wardell) and for Islington, South and Finsbury, (Mr. Smith) tabled questions in October, before the end of the previous Session, seeking information on, for example, whether regional health authorities had forwarded circulars and plans, the number of victims so far, and what funds had been allocated. I understand that the Minister has not replied to those questions. I am not blaming him personally, but no letter has been received. The only answer received was:

"I shall write to the hon. Members."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1986; Vol. 103, c. *578*.]

No letter has been received — and I checked this morning. That is just the sort of information that is required and it is why the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has introduced his Bill and asked for important information. Even now we need the information that is in the Government's hands. We need to know which health authorities have taken initiatives and made progress.

I fully support the Bill. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East for introducing it. I am sure that it will receive its Second Reading today, but it is only the second step in a campaign that still entails much hard work if most people are to understand the severity of the message and of the need for their personal response before it is too late.

1.52 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): It is good to hear the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) congratulating the Government on their response to this new disease and public concern about it. Those congratulations are well merited because, after all, the Government have committed substantial resources to dealing with the problem.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned briefing newspapers. My impression is that a good deal of that has been done with some success. Not all the newspaper articles have been as helpful and accurate as others, but there has been a good deal of press publicity. The Government have reconstituted the Health Education Council as a special health authority and have embarked on a massive publicity campaign. The leaflet is very good in that it was intended for general distribution. It trod carefully the difficult line between giving explicit information and not causing offence. I hope that in due course other leaflets will be available, perhaps in different styles and directed to particular audiences.

I have my reservations about the television advertisement. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey may have misunderstood its intention, which I believe was simply to draw attention to the leaflet, and not to give information, but I am not sure that it was successful in doing that. It drew attention to volcanoes, but it was seeking to draw attention to the leaflet itself, not the envelope in which it arrived. For the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch), the most important thing would have been to do that.

Issuing the leaflet was certainly a good first step. Because there is no known cure for AIDS, the first priority must be education and the second must be the identification and care of the victims. On both those matters there is obviously a limit to what the Government can do and responsibility moves to the district health authorities. That is why I welcome the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on his intiative in drawing it up and presenting it to the House. As the hon. Gentleman said, it will give the health authorities that extra incentive to do what many are doing already and to provide the Department with vital information.

If I have any reservations about the Bill it is that I would put a question mark over clause 1(2)*(f)*. I wonder whether it is practical for a health authority to give estimates of the number of people

"who are likely to fall within each of the paragraphs . . . above"—

in other words, those likely to contract AIDS. The figures can be only estimates and, as we know, in Britain and in America the estimates vary wildly and can only be the result of guesswork because there are so many imponderables and because we know so little about the way in which the disease develops. I wonder whether it is reasonable to expect district health authorities to put into an official report figures that could not be supported. Some may be able to draw conclusions from current figures, but I am not sure that district health authorities should put estimates of that sort into what would be a statutory document.

We had a full debate on AIDS in November, to which I made a brief contribution. I do not intend to go into detail now about this serious and complex subject. I must stress, however, that although there is currently no known cure for AIDS it is not true, as has been said in some quarters, that little is being done to find one. The Government have made an additional £1 million available for research, over and above the 21 projects already under way at a cost of some £2·4 million. Several drug companies —I have a local interest in Burroughs Wellcome—are devoting substantial resources to research into AIDS, often at the expense of work on possible cures for diseases that are currently causing more deaths and suffering than AIDS. Any drug company that could prodice a cure would be doing not only an enormous service to the community but would benefit financially. There is no doubt that the drug companies are working hard to try to find a vaccine or a cure. However, I fear that it will be a long time before we can be sure that we have found such a cure. Even if the companies appear to be having successes it is important that the drugs are properly tested because, in recent memory, there have been cases of drugs coming on to the market that have been found to have unfortunate side effects.

One is not being part of any campaign against homosexuals by pointing out that at present in the United Kingdom AIDS is primarily a homosexual disease. Of the 610 patients up to the end of 1986, 538 were male homosexuals or bisexuals. Of the 293 deaths, 244 were in that category. Therefore, I suggest that there is a special responsibility on homosexuals as to how they behave among themselves and the extent to which they seek to interest and involve others, especially the young, in homosexual activity.

Discussion often centres on whether this is a moral issue and whether Ministers and others should be moralising. I am sure that Ministers should not be moralising and I am not sure whether chief constables should, but sometimes I should like to see more members of the clergy moralising, especially on issues such as this. However, when one hears of clergymen calling themselves "gay Christians" it is a little difficult to know in which direction they are going.

I suggest that this is a moral issue because when we talk of morals we are referring to a code of personal conduct and the way in which we conduct our personal relationships with other people, whether that is based on a religious ethic or not. That is surely what morals are all about. Therefore, AIDS should be taken into account in our personal moral codes, particularly with regard to the homosexual community. It is very important that all of us, and especially the homosexual community, realise the implicatons of AIDS, how it can be caught and what can follow from it.

I return to the point, therefore, that we must have as much information as possible and that that information should be conveyed to as many people as possible. Although the Government and the DHSS have a great responsibility, a great deal of responsibility rests with the district health authorities in this matter. In that connection, I return to the Bill which, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said in his opening remarks, should serve to galvanise district health authorities into action. I hope that it will do just that. I warmly support the Bill and wish it well.

2 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): We know that a system of voluntary reporting of cases on a confidential basis to the communicable disease surveillance centre has been established. However, last October the Minister stated that no decision had been made to go beyond that.

The Bill goes beyond that and will put our knowledge about the spread of AIDS on a quantifiable basis. Some of the information is already being obtained and there should be no insuperable difficulty about health authorities and health boards instituting the administrative procedures necessary to gather and collate information.

To increase the accuracy of the statistics, but I realise primarily to help stop the spread of the disease, voluntary screening should also be made available on a totally confidential basis. Information can no doubt be gathered from VD clinics, counselling centres and other sources within the districts or region of any health board. I emphasise that it is important to obtain that information confidentially and it is important to demonstrate to those at risk that confidentiality will be observed.

In due course, the Bill will enable us to verify the scope of the problem and whether it is being appreciated properly. It will also help us to decide whether estimates

[Dr. John Marek]

made some years ago were accurate. If they are not, they will be shown to be inaccurate much earlier than if the Bill had not been enacted. If our predictions or the Government's predictions are seen as not being fulfilled, early reappraisal will be possible.

The Opposition also believe that the Bill is important because it will provide some check on whether the Government's advertising is having an effect. Many comments are being passed throughout the country and even in the Tea Rooms of the House of Commons about the efficacy or otherwise of the advertising campaign. However, we will be able to decide whether the Government are spending their money wisely in their advertising campaign only if the information is available.

There are many ways to solve a problem. One is to chuck money at it. However, resources are too precious to be frittered away, and the Bill will enable us to check that resources are not being wasted. I am not arguing that resources should not be deployed. I am merely asking for wise and sensible deployment. Unfortunately, this Government too often use that argument for not spending any money at all. If they were to adopt that policy with regard to the containment of AIDS, it would be disastrous.

The effects of the Bill will also help to counter ignorance, the spread of alarm and scaremongering. There is no substitute for accurate information as a means of making the public aware of the scale of the problem. We should be seeking the public's help and generating a responsible attitude throughout society.

Mr. Tony Banks: Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that the Government are spending about £20 million on an advertising campaign yet it appears from the figures that they are spending only about £3·5 million on research into a cure for AIDS? Is that not a rather strange scale of priorities?

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is right and I shall make some comments on research later. If the Government do not want a bipartisan approach to the problem, the Opposition are willing to co-operate, but they must take the comments of Opposition Members and concerned people seriously and ensure that resources are not taken away from AIDS research, advertising and education simply because they do not want to spend money and this is a case in which they need not spend it.

The Bill will ensure that much better information on carriers becomes available. Officially, there are 30,000 carriers, but some put the figure at 100,000. That may be alarmist, and if the Bill is passed, we shall have a better appreciation of how many carriers there are. More information will become available as to how the disease is transmitted. We are continually learning about it, but the Bill will help that process. Our knowledge is growing, but a whole population study will be invaluable as a means of control and observation of the incidence of the disease and its eventual eradication. The title of the Bill is "AIDS (Control) Etc. Bill." I wish that we could interpret "Control" as eradication, but, unfortunately, it must rather be interpreted as observation and monitoring. Sadly, at present there is no cure.

If the Bill is given a Second Reading today, and I hope that it will, perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East will go further and ask the Government what provision they are making. Would it be possible for the Government to prepare an annual report from these district and health board reports? If they were to produce an annual report, they could say what funds were being applied where, what research projects were being undertaken, what we were learning from other countries and what we were doing to develop counselling and education.

We must face the problem of confidentiality versus availability of information. In some areas the number of people registered as carrying the AIDS virus could be as low as one, two or three. If there were a problem of identification caused by the statistics, clearly confidentiality must take priority. However, that is not an excuse for the Government to say, "We cannot release any information." The Government are obliged to provide as detailed information as possible, subject only to the overriding criterion of maintaining confidentiality.

If the Government prepare a report, they could give the basis for the distribution of resources and we could check that the resources were being properly targeted. The Bill is not an excuse for the Government to do nothing until information from the reports starts to come in.

This is an example of where additional income is required by the National Health Service. AIDS was unknown less than a decade ago; it has come upon us in the past four years. The Government are fond of saying that the growth in the NHS budget has been 24 per cent. above the rate of inflation, but that does not take account of the medical retail price index, medical advances and operations that we can do now but could not do five years ago. The figure does not take into account the effects of greatly increased unemployment and the increased resources that must be employed as a result. Nor does it take into account the fact that we have an increasingly aging population. AIDS is yet another reason why that 24 per cent. is not all that it seems to be. AIDS requires additional expenditure.

The Opposition, together with the Government, consider that this is an important issue. We should like a bipartisan approach. It is only as a united country that we can tackle this dreadful disease. For a bipartisan approach we need to be convinced that the Government not only are taking the issues seriously—I believe they are—but are putting the resources into the right places to back up their concern. In particular, it is not acceptable for the Secretary of State for the Environment, in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 12 January this year, to say that it was for local authorities to assess their own priorities for expenditure. My hon. Friend had asked the Secretary of State what advice he gave local councils on the priority to be attached to spending money on local campaigns to warn people of the dangers of AIDS.

Of course, we all know that in many ways local authorities are strapped for cash and cannot have the freedom to take the measures that they consider they should take to educate people about the dangers of AIDS.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend had made a good point. The London borough of Newham is trying to run an imaginative series of schemes to educate people—its staff and members of the public generally—about the problem of AIDS. The borough is faced with a 10 per cent. cut in the resources that it is to get from the Government. How can a borough such as Newham manage to equate the two positions?

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend has made a good point. I know that he will try to make a contribution to the debate later. I hope that he will forgive me—I agree with him completely—if I do not comment any further.

The money being spent on research is not sufficient. Again, in a written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 16 January the Minister said that the amounts of money being listed were not by any means large enough.

As was pointed out earlier, the Opposition wish to see the Government earnestly address themselves to research and to committing resources to it. If the Minister—I think he said this a few months ago—still maintains that all worthwhile projects are being funded, I should like him to say so again now. I should like that fact to be known publicly. It would be valuable to know of any research projects in this country, or perhaps in other countries so that we can tackle this disease, and the money should be available. It should be available as an extra. NHS patients who have a broken leg, who require a by-pass operation, or who have cancer, do not want to be told, "Sorry, you cannot come in for your operation because the money is required for AIDS. We do not know when we can have you in, but you may come in at a later time." Money for AIDS research must be provided over and above any other provision for the National Health Service.

This is an important subject. I do not wish to conclude my remarks—many more important points still must be made—but other hon. Members and the Minister wish to speak. The Bill is supported by informed and responsible opinion. It is supported by the British Medical Association and, to my knowledge, all the bodies that are concerned with AIDS and its treatment. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East on bring forward this Bill. I ask the House to give it a Second Reading.

2.13 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I shall rattle away, because the time available is rather short. I wish to make some points about the Bill as well as answer those that have been asked of me during the debate. If my opening words are brief, I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) will not misunderstand it as failing to wish to congratulate him on his luck in the ballot and on bringing forward this measure. I am aware of the importance he attaches to the AIDS problem, and for good reasons, given the nature and scale of the problem in the city of which he represents part.

I say gently to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) that if the Government were looking for excuses to do nothing, as he suggested towards the end of his speech, I doubt whether I should be standing here in the friendly way in which I am at the moment. We could perfectly easily have thought of endless reasons for not having the Bill and for seeking to prevent it being passed. I am bound to tell the House, if only as a matter of propriety, that, strictly speaking, we do not consider that the Bill is needed. Quite apart from the existing accounting arrangements for reporting within the Health Service, the National Health Service Act 1977 already contains provisions that enable the Secretary of State to direct local authorities to provide him with certain information. Having made those points, I certainly do not intend to use them as reasons for advising the House not to proceed with the Bill.

However, I have some anxieties about the details of the provisions of the Bill as it stands—anxieties which have been echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and, to a responsible degree, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. There is no doubt that, in our judgment, a number of problems would be created if the Bill were to be enacted in exactly its present form. The most serious of those difficulties is the one on which hon. Members have touched—the threat to the confidentiality of AIDS patients which it could pose in some circumstances.

Although the number of AIDS cases is increasing, the number of patients being treated is relatively small, as several hon. Members have said—only a few hundred—and will remain so for some years. The number will grow but will remain small relative to the instances of many other diseases. That means that in many health authority areas there will be only a handful of AIDS patients. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo)—who has not made a speech but has made some helpful, or otherwise interventions—wished to have a breakdown of AIDS patients by sex and sexual proclivity and the route by which it was thought that transmission had occurred. Such an analysis would probably be easy in a district that had only one AIDS patient, but it would certainly raise questions as to how far the confidentiality of that patient was being safeguarded.

Leaving aside the Thames regions, no region—let alone district—has more than 13 live AIDS patients. In other words, if the number of cases in each health district is published, there is a risk to the confidentiality of an individual patient. It is vital, as I think everyone accepts, that we should preserve such confidentiality. If we cannot guarantee it, many people will be unwilling to come forward for testing and treatment, and AIDS will be driven underground. This is quite apart from the moral issues which would be raised by breaking confidentiality about a matter of this kind.

Another consequence is that some doctors, to protect their patients, would cease to report cases of AIDS, and the effective national reporting system operated by the communicable disease surveillance centre, to which the hon. Member for Wrexham referred, would be undermined.

The problem of district analysis of antibody-positive patients, which is called for in one subsection, is considerable. At present, we have no central record of in which district such patients reside. The present system of testing and reporting, which I think we all have agreed works well, is not district-based. Some districts do not have laboratories that undertake antibody testing.

Some patients—this is an important point because this probably happens with other sexually transmitted diseases as well—travel on purpose outside their districts for testing and-or diagnosis. Even to collect data on the district from which positive blood samples originated would impose a considerable burden on the people collecting those reports at the CDSC and is likely to produce misleading data. In any case, the number of known antibody-positives in each district is not in itself helpful, in that only a small proportion of those that have been infected have been identified. Projections of how

[Mr. Tony Newton]

many extra might be identified in the following 12 months would not have a great deal of value for planning purposes, other than to help estimate the additional counselling load.

I must make it clear to the House that we do not believe that it is sensible at present to attempt any local analysis in that degree of detail of cases and of reporting antibody-positives other than at regional level. Interpretation of the data obtained from blood testing requires skills that may not be available in each district. The communicable disease surveillance centre would not have the resources to assist each and every district in attempting its projections. Even at regional level, there are problems in making projections even as far ahead as 12 months. When the numbers are small, the errors involved can be large.

To sum up, although we would not oppose analysis of data at regional level and would see some advantages in doing that, we think it important not to run the risks that I have just sought to describe of jeopardising the present excellent national system at the communicable disease surveillance centre.

In reply to the point made earlier, we have already undertaken to make regular national figures available on the number of AIDS cases on monthly and quaterly bases and to provide a broad analysis including an assessment of the trend, insofar as it can be identified, in the number of HIV positives. That picks up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James). There is no suggestion that we should make information available about AIDS only once a year. It is appropriate to impose that obligation annually on health authorities.

I shall not attempt to cover all the technical problems in the Bill, some of which are minor but cannot be dismissed. However, I should touch on one of them which is that the Bill imposes some obligations on health authorities with which in practice they probably could not comply. Whatever they sought to do, they could not easily establish exactly what "treatment and counselling" was being provided by "other public or voluntary bodies" as stated in the Bill.

Such bodies cannot be made to supply the relevant information to health authorities which may not even be aware—although we hope that they would be—of all the organisations operating in their area. It would be difficult for a health authority to obtain every detail of the work being carried out by a private clinic. That is not a major problem, but we must keep an eye on it when considering the drafting and the amending which will no doubt need to be considered as the Bill goes into Committee, should the House give it a Second Reading.

Leaving aside pure nit-picking points, something in the Bill is rather ironic and in the circumstances I see it as a defect. Manifestly, the assumption and the wish on both sides of the House has been that that data should be made available by the district health authorities and the regional health authorities to the Secretary of State so that it can be communicated to the public at large. But there is, as I read the Bill, no requirement for the information to be published. The House may wish to consider that, too. The Government are ready to accept the basic purpose of the Bill but has serious reservations about the detail of some of the drafting. I know that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will understand that.

I must apologise for the fact that I shall have little time to reply to all the points made. However, It would be right to devote a moment or two to them, especially in view of the reference by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to the information that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) sought earlier about district facts. I must apologise that there has not yet apparently been a reply to that letter.

I shall give the House a quick rundown on how that matter stands at present. In January 1986, a health circular was issued to regional and district health authorities giving them resource assumptions as the basis for their planning. It requested all districts to develop a plan of action concentrating on high-risk groups, complementing the national publicity campaign and including provision for testing and counselling services and for treating clinical AIDS cases. Those plans were to be submitted by the end of June 1986, and subsequently included in regional short-term programmes.

That advice has been amplified in various ways in the intervening period and on 23 December 1986, the secretary of State wrote to all district health chairmen stressing that he expected the plans to reflect the needs of those parts of the Health Service which would be under additional pressures because of AIDS, especially clinics for sexually transmitted diseases. They were also asked to provide details of their proposals for future years in their short-term plans. That material is now being analysed and I am happy to tell the House that we have received reports from all district health authorities with one possible exception, which tells us that its report is in the post.

Mr. Tony Banks: Like a cheque.

Mr. Newton: I hesitated to make the old joke, with which many hon. Members will be familiar.

The Government's intention—this ties in with the purpose of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East—is that a national picture should be obtained from the reports, from which, among other things, examples of good practice will be identified. Details of the national strategy which emerge, together with a commentary on it and examples of good practice, will be fed back to regional and district authorities and to other bodies with an interest in health care planning.

To my regret, it is hardly possible for me to say much about the many issues that have been raised during the debate. I shall try to respond to one or two of them in the short time that remains. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke about the television advertising. The advertisement was intended merely to draw attention to the leaflet in a way which would be dramatic. It has had to compete with all the other things that appear during a television commercial break, and I believe that it has been effective. I think that even the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will agree with me that a television commercial that attempted to tell people what the risks were, to communicate what are not risks and to tell young people how to use condoms, which was one of his suggestions, would be a television programme and not a commercial.

There is a great deal going on, and the broadcasting authorities have been extremely co-operative. The Government will be seeking to build on the public

education campaign and to move on from merely drawing attention to the leaflet to conveying particular messages. I hope that it is clearly understood that the purpose of that which we have done so far is to draw attention to the source of the information, which is the leaflet.

In courtesy to the House and to ensure that I do not inadvertently talk out the Bill, I leave the matter there. I am prepared to advise the House to let the Bill have a Second Reading on the basis that we shall need to do a good deal of work in Committee.

2.28 pm

Mr. Strang: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply briefly to the debate in the short time that remains.

I am grateful to all those who have participated in the debate. Everyone who has done so has supported the Bill in principle. I am grateful to hon. Members for the manner in which the debate has been conducted. Like the debate which took place on 21 November, it has been an instructive and sensible contribution to the wiser debate that will continue in the country on this issue.

I am sure that it will be understood if I do not refer to individual contributions save to thank the occupants of both Front Benches and the spokesperson of the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I say a special "thank you" to the Minister for Health for the help that he has given. It is fair to acknowledge that we had a constructive exchange during the parliamentary recess. Had it not been for that meeting, I doubt whether I would have reached the stage of being able to introduce a Bill that would have the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The Minister has raised a number of important issues. I acknowledge that confidentiality is important and I respect that point of view. I doubt whether there will be any difficulty about that. The Minister referred to a number of practical matters, including the requirement of statistics. It is important that we cover that area of the Bill in a more pragmatic way. I am sure that there will be no difficulty in doing that should the House give the Bill a Second Reading and enable it to be considered in Committee.

The comments made and issues raised in debating the Bill have been basically supportive. The Bill, however, should not be regarded as being primarily about statistics. It is not.

Mr. Newton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Strang: The Minister recognises that.

The Bill is directed to an area of activity and I believe that it will make a valuable contribution to resource planning. I accept what the Minister has said about district and regional statistics, and resources will have to be targeted into different areas of the country. I am grateful for the support which has been given to the Bill and I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Unborn Children (Protection) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.—*[Mr. Burt.]*

2.29 pm

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): I hope that the House will not consent to give a Second Reading to a Bill on the basis of a debate that will last about 35 seconds. The Bill deals with a subject which, as we know from what has happened in past sessions, is highly controversial and there are many strongly held opinions——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 20 February.

REGISTER OF SASINES (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SCHOOL GOVERNORS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 January.

DOG FIGHTING (PENALTIES) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

POLICE COMPLAINTS AUTHORITY (INFORMATION) BILL

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): If that was a Government objection, no fixed day; if it was a Back-Bench objection, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 January.

Arts Council (Budget)

Motion made, and Question proposed, that this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This is the third time lucky for me in respect of this subject, because I first attempted to raise the matter of the Arts Council budget on 11 December but abstruse parliamentary procedure at that time conspired against me. There was a point when I thought that I might end up raising Arts Council budget for 1988-89, but I realise that by then we shall have a Labour Government and a Labour Arts Minister with far greater resources at his or her disposal. There will be infinitely more imagination and excitement in our arts policy.

This is the first occasion upon which the matter of the Arts Council budget for 1987-88 has been raised on the Floor of the House other than through parliamentary questions. The Government's original announcement was made on 17 November by the somewhat sneaky method of a planted written answer. There was no statement from the Dispatch Box, when the Minister would have been forced to answer questions from both sides, and no debate has been arranged in Government time since the announcement. I believe this to be cowardly behaviour on the part of the Arts Minister. Perhaps he is afraid to come to the House to justify himself in relation to the Arts Council budget for 1987-88. Thousands of organisations and millions of people in this country are very interested in this annual round of government announcement, Arts Council consideration and decisions and then, of course, the subsequent reactions from the clients who receive the money.

I believe that there are three main reasons why the Minister should be far more forthright in initiating and encouraging broader parliamentary debate on the arts. It is up to him to do this. First, one has to consider the sheer number of people in the country who are genuinely interested in the subject. One can witness to that fact the amount of press interest shown in anything connected with the arts.

Secondly, there is the significance of the arts in our society generally. Socially and economically, the arts are a major factor and it is ridiculous that they should be given such a low priority in the deliberations of this House.

Thirdly, and most importantly from the Minister's point of view, if the Minister is genuinely interested in promoting the arts and the share of public expenditure going to the Office of Arts and Libraries, he must be heard far more shouting the odds for the arts and seen far more fighting his corner, and this is the place where he could most effectively do that. There is not much evidence of it here today, but we know from arts Questions that there is a very big arts lobby in both this House and the other place. Yet the arts are not given sufficient parliamentary time, perhaps because the Minister has shared responsibilities and is more interested in his Cabinet Office duties, or perhaps because he believes that the arts already receive a sufficient share of Government resources. In either case, he should tell the House.

If the Minister is really interested in gaining more resources for the arts, he is going about it in the wrong way. He should be making the case for the arts in this House and in the country generally. There are countless opportunities for an arts Minister to do that. Every respectable and semi-respectable newspaper has one or more arts correspondents — one excludes *The Sun*, of course, though if the Minister considered going topless he might even persuade that publication to devote some attention to the arts. Many radio and television stations are also prepared to give the Minister a platform for the arts. He could be in the news every day of his life—a wonderful opportunity that is denied to a large number of Ministers and politicians generally. I do not understand why the Minister does not seize the opportunity with both hands. If he went on the stomp for the arts around the country, he could whip up a great deal more public opinion and in the end force his ministerial colleagues, both inside and outside the Cabinet, to give him more resources for the arts. They would respond to the amount of public pressure that the Minister had helped to whip up.

In this imperfect world, made that much worse by the divisive policies of the Government, the good guys are usually ignored. I do not wish to be offensive to the Minister—I recognise that he is a pleasant and decent soul—but given the hatchet-faced men and women who are Ministers in the present Government the very fact that he is a pleasant and decent soul probably makes him singularly unfitted to be Minister for the Arts. I am not suggesting that the arts are more important than education, social services, transport or defence. I am simply arguing that they are equally important and relevant to every other area of social concern and expenditure. All too often in this society the arts are regarded as some sort of luxury, as a bit of flimsy, a bit of social decoration. They are not regarded as politically significant. That error is made by both sides of the House. The Minister for the Arts is usually regarded as occupying a rather lowly position in the political pecking order. That has been true, and at the moment it remains true, in both the Conservative party and the Labour party. As in local government, responsibility for the arts is traditionally given to politicians who have reached the end of the political road and have their political futures behind them, but there are encouraging signs that that attitude is changing among the Opposition parties.

I put it to the Minister that by his low profile, either out of choice or by personal disposition, he has done a bad job for the arts in respect of the 1987-88 budget. There are many arguments about how much or how little the present Government have invested in the arts. I use the word "invested" deliberately. Like Oscar Wilde, I have no great love of those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, but the Minister must not be allowed to continue to make his extravagant and at times very misleading statistical claims. According to the Government, the grant to the Arts Council has risen by 8 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80, but no one in the art world believes that.

I will give some of the facts. The basic Arts Council grant was £63·125 million in 1979-80. In 1987-88 it will be £113·8 million. That is the basic grant. I am excluding abolition money because it is not new money for the arts. If one measures those figures against the retail price index, they represent a real decrease of 3 per cent. against the RPI between 1979-80 and 1987-88. There is a difference between the figures that are being bandied about. The Minister uses the gross domestic product deflator rather than the RPI for calculating the changes in the grant. The most relevant index for the arts is the average earnings

index. If that index had been applied to the Arts Council between 1979-80 and 1987-88, it would be seen to have suffered a 22 per cent. cut in its grant in real terms.

The Minister may ask, "Why use the average earnings index?" The answer is obvious as 60 per cent. of arts expenditure is in direct labour costs. One can be even fairer, however, and use the arts index employed by the Cork theatre inquiry — 60 per cent. average earnings index and 40 per cent. retail price index. If one uses the Cork index, which seems the most appropriate for the arts, the decrease in the Arts Council grant, between 1979-80 and 1987-88, is 15 per cent. To make the calculation, assumptions are made of a 6 per cent. increase in average earnings for 1987-88 and a 3·5 per cent. increase in the retail price index, which I think is a conservative estimate as the general feeling is that for 1987-88 inflation will be running at about 5 per cent.

If we compare the period 1984-85, when there was a strong downward pressure on earnings and prices, with 1987-88, which is the most helpful comparison for the Government, the arts index shows an 8·5 per cent decrease in the Arts Council's grant. If we use the Cork arts index to compare the periods 1986-87 to 1987-88, the decrease in real terms for the Arts Council is 1·5 per cent. All the time we are talking about real decreases in the money that the Minister has made available to the Arts Council.

What has been the impact for the arts? The Arts Council can pass on to its clients only that which the Government give it in central funds. That means that for 1987-88 the great majority of Arts Council clients will receive real cuts in their budgets. As both Priestley and Rayner discovered, the major arts organisations are efficiently run; they are not profligate, as some members on both sides of the House would maintain. One of the advantages of my speaking on the matter now is that the Arts Council has made its decisions, and we know that the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Opera House and the South Bank board have been given stand-still grants. In effect, that means that they will face real cuts of the order of 6 to 7 per cent. Even English National Opera, which has been given a 2·6 per cent. increase in its grant, will be facing a cut after allowing for inflation. I could go through each of the clients of the Arts Council to prove the point, but I do not think that there is any need to take it further.'

The arts now face a double failure—first a failure by the Arts Council to act as an aggressive campaigning lobby for the Arts. The reappointment of Sir William Rees-Mogg shows how highly the Government regard him, which, I imagine, shows how little he must have troubled them on behalf of the arts. The other failure is the failure of the Minister to win more Government resources for the arts, if he ever attempted to do so. I would be obliged if the Minister would reply to that point. That double failure of the Arts Council and the Government means that the arts in Britain are desperately in need of friends.

In the end, all the arguments about Government financial support for the arts are about insignificant crumbs when one considers the extent of the Government's public expenditure each year. For 1987-88, total Government spending will amount to £148 billion. The total arts budget—all the money in addition to the Arts Council grant which goes to museums, art galleries, libraries; the lot—amounts to £339 million. That is less than one quarter of 1 per cent. of the Government's total spending. That is crazy. The £339 million for total arts spending amounts to less than one year's expenditure on fortress Falklands, which is now running at £1 million a day. The Government wrote off £1 billion of taxpayers' money in respect of Nimrod, and that represents 10 years of total arts spending on the Arts Council grant.

That is the scale of the difference in the spending patterns of the Government. Their priorities are all wrong in this respect. What, in future years, will be the most treasured legacy that we shall be passing on to succeeding generations? Will it be the scrap metal of once expensive military hardware or the timeless cultural heritage of music, plays, literature and works of art? By virtue of the miserable 1987-88 arts provision, the Government have yet again revealed their perverted social priorities, lack of vision and philistine mentality. The arts world in its entirety is now praying for the return of a Labour Government.

2.46 pm

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on achieving this Adjournment debate, even though he says, "third time lucky". I can assure him that it was no intention of mine, and I have no powers, to seek to delay an Adjournment debate. Whether it could have been achieved before Christmas was entirely in the hands of the House. For my part, I am glad that he has this debate because it gives me yet another chance to talk about the arts.

My congratulations must end there. Some of the things that the hon. Gentleman says are extraordinary. Not long ago he asked me what my activities in the arts world had been in the previous year and a half or so. I gave him a full answer which showed that I travel round all parts of the country and have visited over 150 arts organisations. Each time I go out I talk to the media in the regions, who take an intense interest in the arts. Since arts should be available for all people in Britain, it is important to get out and about and see what is happening. That is the key to this debate. Therefore, I shall seek to answer some of the hon. Gentleman's points.

The hon. Gentleman sometimes reminds me of that great character from English literature, A. A. Milne's Eeyore, who, whenever confronted with news of any kind, would contrive to turn it into forebodings of doom.

Last year, for instance, the hon. Gentleman forecast for the South Bank:

"dark nights in all the theatres and concert halls". — *[Official Report,* 14 November 1985 ; Vol. 86, c. 702.]

He forecast enormous suffering from the great centres of art to

"the smallest of the touring companies." — *[Official Report,* 27 March 1986; Vol. 94, c. 1102.]

and estimated a shortfall in arts funding in London which would run to about £10 million in that year. Of course, none of that proved to be true, as we all know.

What are the facts? Let me get to the heart of them. The central arts and libraries expenditure for 1987-88 will rise by 5·4 per cent., which is broadly in line with the increase for public expenditure as a whole that year. The hon. Gentleman made play with the criteria for those statistics and said that he would rather have the earnings or the retail prices index. The plain fact is that the GDP deflator is the understood measurement for that type of public expenditure, and it was used by the Labour Government in the 1970s. That is the standard understanding of the

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basis upon which we calculate those prices and increases. There has been a 5·4 per cent. increase in the overall expenditure, in line with the general increase of public expenditure that year.

The arts have not lost out. The new British Library project is, of course, part of that programme. It was a 1979 manifesto commitment and we have upheld it. We are reaching the peak years of expenditure on that major new institution, which will be for the benefit of learning in this country. I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports that. Some people say that that project has nothing to do with the arts, but arts and libraries should go together because each has a mission of civilising and enriching that complements the other. I am not suggesting that the hon. Gentleman is attacking the Library. However, we must take the British Library into account when we consider the global arts expenditure figures.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is why the percentage that the Minister has given is being pushed up.

Mr. Luce: We must take every component part of the arts budget into account. We should consider our national galleries and museums, the British Library and also the performing arts.

I shall now turn to specific aspects concerning the Arts Council. Next year's budget gives it an increase of 3·5 per cent. in its basic funding from central Government. That is broadly in line with predicted inflation. Over and above that—the hon. Gentleman did not recognise this fact—I have managed to provide an extra £3 million for the Arts Council, which it did not expect, to lessen the incidence of the taper on abolition funding. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about that.

To put it mildly, there seems to be considerable confusion as to what the hon. Gentleman's party's policy on the arts is. The Government have upheld their policy commitment to keep up central Government funding support for the arts. Indeed, we have surpassed our commitment. The Arts Council grant is up by over 7 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80. If one includes abolition money—the hon. Gentleman chooses not to do so, but I accept that there has been a shift from local to central Government—the Arts Council's grant has risen by 32 per cent. in real terms. It is receiving more in real terms than it ever did under any previous Government. I should have thought that that was an occasion for praise rather than for criticism by the hon. Gentleman.

I recognise that there are continuing problems and pressures in certain areas, many of which arise from the increasingly competing demands in the arts world. It is for the Arts Council to seek ways to overcome them, often in conjunction with regional arts associations, local authorities and the private sector.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for the purveyors of pessimism to forecast Armageddon and "cataclysmic collapses" when they are faced, as they are, by the evidence all around us of a remarkable growth of interest and participation in the arts. Even *The Guardian* recognised that in a recent reference to the "positive flowering" of the arts. There has been a resurgence in cinema attendances, a virtual doubling of the number of arts centres since 1979, a doubling of the number of museums over the past 15 years, with a new museum reportedly opening every fortnight now, more people attending the theatre than going to football matches, and in autumn 1986 Greater London Arts claimed, in its quarterly journal, to fund "more arts activities by more artists, in more areas than ever before".

The evidence is there on nearly every front, but the hon. Gentleman simply chooses to ignore it. I see those developments for myself as I travel round the country. As he will know from my answer to his recent question, I have visited over 150 arts organisations. Only two evenings ago, on Wednesday, I visited the Temba theatre to see "Woza Albert!" I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there was no lack of enthusiasm or vigour in the performance. The Temba theatre is financially supported by the Arts Council, among others.

There are many other examples of success stories, rather than failures, upon which the hon. Gentleman could focus. There is, for example the Beck theatre in the borough of Hillingdon where Charles Vance Ltd. has been brought in to help run the centre and is saving the Hillingdon authority considerable sums of money over the next five years by its very efficient running of the theatre.

There is also the interesting example of the Empire theatre in Liverpool, where Apollo Leisure is playing a leading part in helping to make it a success and to save the taxpayer and the ratepayer money. That is an example of how partnerships between the private and public sectors can play a positive role.

The Institute of Contemporary Arts is now celebrating its 40th anniversary, and I am sure that both sides of the House congratulate it on that. It is increasingly dependent upon resources from a variety of areas, especially the private sector, even though the Arts Council has managed to increase its support.

The hon. Gentleman continues to be one of many on the Opposition Benches who were profoundly pessimistic about the effect on the arts of the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties, but the fact is that I was able to increase the Arts Council funding for abolition purposes in the current financial year from the £16 million originally allocated to £25 million.

The Arts Council had calculated the total requirement for arts bodies that served a wider area than a single borough at £35 million, and I was confident that the successor authorities — the London boroughs, the districts and the metropolitan county areas — would come forward with the remaining £10 million. In the event, they did much better than that. I congratulate them. After some intricate bargaining, the Arts Council contribution was matched by £14 million from the local authorities. No major arts body went to the wall, and many have expanded since then. The crisis did not happen. Of course, I look to the local authorities to play an increasingly important role in the financing of arts organisations.

In the past, the hon. Gentleman has referred repeatedly to the South Bank. The Arts Council has allocated £8·76 million for 1987-88, and I am confident that it will continue following the constructive policy of keeping the best from the previous GLC regime while introducing sensible innovations of its own. This is an appropriate occasion to congratulate Mr. Ronnie Grierson and his board on the South Bank. Their ambitious programme for the future includes the material refurbishment of the whole area. They are doing a splendid job.

The record of this Government on the arts is one of which we may be proud. We promised to uphold central

Government support for the arts and we have done so. We said that we would ease the transition in the abolition areas and we have done so. But the hon. Gentleman, like his colleagues, has far too narrow a vision of the arts. It is a profound mistake to think that the climate in the arts is determined solely by the level of central Government funding. Important though that funding is, the whole thrust of our strategy has been to encourage the funding of arts from a plurality of sources. Central Government, local government, businesses, private patrons, and above all the consumer at the box office all have an essential contribution to make.

In addition, it has been part of our strategy of creating a framework of opportunity for the arts to encourage and promote business and private support. The business sponsorship incentive scheme began two years ago. That scheme, ably administered by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts has dramatically accelerated the rate of growth of business sponsorship until it is now running at the rate of some £25 million a year. I know that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that scheme and I trust that he will share my optimism that business sponsorship will continue to flourish to the benefit of the arts throughout the country.

While I am on this subject, I am sure that the House will join me in welcoming the announcement this week that Sainsbury's arts sponsorship committee is to give over £100,000 to the National Youth theatre. That is a marvellous memorial to the late Michael Croft, who built up the theatre over a period of 30 years. In the same way, the measures announced in the 1986 Budget to encourage charitable giving will enable both corporations and individuals, through single donations and the payroll scheme, to increase their contributions to the arts.

The hon. Gentleman is also using too narrow a focus when he neglects to look at the consumer side of the equation. In fact, the dominant factor in arts expenditure is the consumer. It is for that reason that the Arts Council has recently established a marketing department that is designed to help arts institutions to target their customers and provide the services that the customers would like to see. To help foster this new climate of opportunity, I have recently announced a new arts marketing scheme with a budget of £0·25 million of public money, to encourage arts bodies to market themselves more actively and effectively. The scheme will take the form of matching grants to enable arts organisations to put into practice a selected number of new and original marketing ideas—the results will be available for the benefit of others.

The hon. Gentleman has argued the case for greater funding of the Arts Council. I confess that I—and I think many in the country—are highly confused as to what his party's policy on the Arts Council is. He wants to expand its funding, but a recent policy document by his party appeared to envisage emasculating it entirely. I do not know what the position is, now that disaster has befallen the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan). However that may be, the Government's support for the principle of "arms length", and for the excellent work of the Arts Council, is very clear. I gladly pay tribute to the way in which its secretary-general Mr. Luke Rittner and his staff carry out their duties. I add my appreciation for the outstanding contribution of Sir William Rees-Mogg, who has recently agreed to continue as chairman of the Arts Council for a further two years. I have noticed during my time in office that neither of those two gentlemen hesitate to make their views known, in public and in private, about what they think is required in funding for the Arts Council. I have every confidence that the Arts Council will continue to do an excellent job.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 January 1987

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Third World (Debt Burden)

64. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards relieving the debt burden of Third world countries.

67. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any new proposals for the reduction of the debt burden of developing countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: We believe that both creditor and debtor countries have a role to play in tackling the debt problem. Creditor countries need to promote sustained growth in the world economy, while maintaining open markets. Individual debtor countries need to adjust their economies, supported by the necessary external finance. With others, we will continue to play an active part in seeking to increase the flow of resources to debtor countries in support of adjustment.

India

68. **Mr. Stuart Holland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is reviewing project aid to India; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The aid programme to India, including project aid, is kept under regular review. At the bilateral aid talks in December we advised the Indian Government that we would welcome new project proposals in sectors where we believe we could make a strong contribution. For tied aid they include power, coal and water. For poverty alleviating projects they include slum improvement, natural resources, water and sanitation, and family planning and health.

Vaccination (United Nations Programme)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom will make to the United Nations international children's emergency fund programme of vaccination of children by 1990.

Mr. Chris Patten: We expect to continue to contribute to UNICEF's regular budget, which underpins the immunisation programme, and from time to time to special appeals. Much of our £1 million response to the latest UNICEF special appeal for Africa is being spent on immunisation programmes. I am considering the possibility of further help and will be discussing the issue with UNICEF shortly.

Overseas Aid Budget

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of gross domestic product was represented by the overseas aid budget in each of the years 1978 to 1986, inclusive; and what he expects it to be in the next three years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Net public expenditure on overseas aid as defined in British Aid Statistics, copies of which are in the Library of the House, as a percentage of GDP in 1978-85 was as follows:

	Percentage
1978	0·42
1979	0·44
1980	0·37
1981	0·42
1982	0·36
1983	0·36
1984	0·37
1985	0·34

Figures are not yet available for 1986. It is not Government policy to forecast what the percentage is likely to be in future years.

PRIME MINISTER

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Shaw) on 19 December 1986, at columns 761 and 762.

A detailed list of United Kingdom presidency achievements will be placed in the Library of the House shortly.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Prime Minister whether the intention of the Government of the Republic of Ireland to introduce extradition in accordance with the European Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism was conditional upon any matter within the Anglo Irish Agreement; what information she has as to the stage which this proposal by the Irish Government has now reached; and if she is satisfied with its progress.

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 7 of the joint communiqué of 15 November 1985, Cmnd. 9657, stated that at its initial meetings the Intergovernmental Conference would work for early progress in relations between the security forces and the minority community in Northern Ireland, ways of enhancing security co-operation between the two Governments and seeking measures which would give substantial expression to the aim of underlining the importance of public confidence in the administration of justice. The Irish Government announced that, against this background, they intended to accede as soon as possible to the European convention on the suppression of terrorism. The question of conditions did not arise.

The Government have already welcomed the fact that a Bill to enable Irish ratification of the convention without reservation has passed through all its stages in the Dail.

South Africa (Sanctions)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Prime Minister how many letters she has received *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against the Government's stand on sanctions against South Africa; and of each of these, how many are from individuals and how many on behalf of organisations.

The Prime Minister: Since 1 May 1986 I have received about 2,800 letters opposing, and about 5,900 supporting, the Government's stand on sanctions against South Africa. No further breakdown of these figures is available.

La Belle Discotheque (Bombing)

Mr. Dobson asked the Prime Minister if she will publish the signals which showed that the Libyan Government were behind the Berlin night club terrorist bombing.

The Prime Minister: Because of its nature and source, we cannot agree to make public our evidence of Libyan involvement.

Mr. Dobson asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government had any knowledge, at the time of the United States bombing of Libya, of Syrian involvement in the Berlin night club terrorist bombing.

The Prime Minister: We know of no evidence of Syrian involvement in the bombing of La Belle discotheque in Berlin on 5 April 1986.

Mr. Dobson asked the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken since the United States bombing of Libya to find out from the West German or United States Governments evidence of Libyan or Syrian involvement in the Berlin night club terrorist bombing.

The Prime Minister: We have kept closely in touch with other Governments on this matter. There is clear evidence of Libyan involvement in the bombing of La Belle discotheque; as far as we are aware, there is none of Syrian involvement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Statistics

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the percentage of United Kingdom exports of manufactures and visible trade, respectively, which go to the present members of the European Economic Community; and what was the comparable percentage for exports to these nations in each of the previous four years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is in the table.

Proportion of United Kingdom Exports Going to the European Community

	OTS Basis Per cent.	
	Total Visible Trade	*Manufactures*
1982	44	40
1983	46	40
1984	47	41
1985	49	42
[1]1986	48	44

[1] January-November.
Source: UK Overseas Trade Statistics.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the European Economic Community's market for manufactures is covered by British exports; and what was the comparable percentage for the same nations in each of the previous four years.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1986, the United Kingdom share of the European Community's imports of manufactures is provisionally estimated to have been approximately 8 per cent. The figures for the previous years are in the table.

United Kingdom Share of European Community Imports of Manufactures[1]

	Per cent.
1982	8·0
1983	7·8
1984	8·0
1985	8·2

[1] Standard International Trade Classification, sections 5 to 8.
Source: OECD.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many civil servants employed by his Department and engaged primarily on regional matters are based in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* the north-west.

Mr. Butcher: On 15 December 1986, the following numbers of regionally-based staff were engaged primarily on regional matters:

	Number
Yorkshire and Humberside	106
North-East	202
North-West	224

Ed Doolan

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what purpose, and at what fee, Ed Doolan has been employed under the National Quality Campaign.

Mr. Butcher: Mr. Doolan was retained at normal consultancy rates by the Department earlier this year to promote the National Quality Campaign in the West Midlands. He is visiting companies throughout the region to talk about the "total" or "company-wide" approach to quality featured in the campaign, and to explain the practical and financial support available to firms seeking to improve their quality performance.

Industrial Innovation (Support)

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the level of support for industrial innovation under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 paid out in Scotland in each year since 1982; if he will express this support as a percentage of total United Kingdom payments in each year; and if he will give the percentage changes in support between years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information is as follows:

	Scotland £'000	United Kingdom £'000	Scotland as percentage of United Kingdom	Year on year change Scotland Per cent.	Year on year change United Kingdom Per cent.
1982-83	447	5,300	8·4	—	—
1983-84	1,514	19,879	7·6	238·7	275·1
1984-85	1,134	36,218	3·1	(25·1)	82·2
1985-86	1,430	30,757	4·6	26·1	(15·1)

Note: "Support for industrial innovation" is taken as compromising the Microelectronics Industry Support Programme, Investment Support for Microelectronics, Support for Advanced Manufacturing Technology, Investment Support for Fibre Optics and Optoelectronics, the Innovation Linked Investment Scheme, and Computer-Aided Design and Test Equipment Support.
Source: Industrial Development Act 1982 annual reports and underlying detail.

EC (Trading Barriers)

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on recent progress to remove trading barriers in the European Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: During the United Kingdom presidency—July–December 1986—the Council adopted or agreed 48 individual measures which will help remove barriers to trade in the Community. This represents a substantial acceleration in progress towards completing the internal market.

Details of 41 of the measures were given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), *Official Report*, 19 December 1986, cols 765-768. The following measures were agreed before the end of the presidency:

Antidioxides
Amendment to Antioxidents Directive.

Public Procurement (Supplies)
Improvements to the EC Supplies Directives, specifying rules for the award of public sector supplies contracts.

Information Technology and Telecommunications Standards
Use of European standards for public purchases when buying IT and telecommunication equipment.

Noise of hydraulic excavators, dozers and loaders
Directive setting noise limits for hydraulic diggers and excavators.

Energy Labelling
Agreement on tolerance levels to be applied in checks on energy labels.

Live animals of the bovine species: amended eradication directives to provide for the final eradication of tuberculosis, brucellosis and leucosis in all Member States including Portugal and Spain
Directive extending EC funding to accelerate schemes for the eradication of tuberculosis, brucellosis and leucosis.

Amendment to Directives 72/461/EEC and 72/462/EEC
Amends Directive on animal health on imports of fresh meat to facilitate imports of animal organs, blood etc.

Shares Manipulation (Anglo-Canadian Investigations)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretaryof State for Trade and Industry if he will approach the Canadian Government with a view to setting up investigations in conjuction with the Canadian authorities to look into the manipulation by majority shareholders and their brokers of shares quoted on both the London and Canadian stock exchanges with funds emanating from minority investors in either Canada or the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is always ready to approach other regulatory authorities if he believes that they may be able to obtain and provide information about matters where the exercise of his own regulatory and investigative powers is involved.

House of Fraser Group

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the recent correspondence he has had with the Lonrho Company about the circumstances in which the Al-Fayed family was given permission to purchase the House of Fraser group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: No.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer again to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the purchase of the House of Fraser company by the Al-Fayed family in the light of the new information which has been presented to him by Lonrho since the date of approval: and if ne will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend is considering carefully material submitted on behalf of Lonrho plc concerning the purchase of House of Fraser by the Fayed family. He will decide what action if any to take in the light of that consideration, and the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has yet replied to the letter dated 18 December from the chairman of Lonrho plc regarding an offer in respect of the House of Fraser.

Mr. Howard: Yes. A reply was sent on 5 January.

Insider Dealings

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grades of civil servant will be covered by his inquiry into insider share dealings; if they will be asked to give details of all their share transactions during the relevant period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The powers vested in the inspectors under section 177 of the Financial Services Act can be exercised in respect of any person—and thus any civil servant—whom the inspectors consider is or may be able to give information concerning a contravention of the Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act. It is for the inspectors to judge whether the details of any individual's dealings may be relevant to the investigation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Council of Ministers (Presidency)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a

statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of foreign affairs.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Shaw) on 19 December 1986.

A detailed list of United Kingdom Presidency achievements will be placed in the Library of the House shortly.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of anti-terrorism measures.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 20 November 1986, to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 3 December 1986 and to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made on 8 December following the European Council.

During our United Kingdom Presidency of the European Community we have given high priority to measures to combat terrorism. Ministers met in the TREVI group on 25 September and 9 December and there was an informal meeting of Interior and Justice Ministers on 20 October. The subject was also discussed by Foreign Ministers meeting in political co-operation and the European Council.

These meetings have resulted in enhanced practical co-operation between member states on counter-terrorism measures including the setting up of a secure communications link between police forces of the member states; intensification of liaison between counter-terrorism experts and mutual exchanges of information about people excluded from the territory of any one member state. A working group was set up to recommend ways of tightening the Community's external frontiers. Common measures were also taken against Syria following the Hindawi trial and the European Council agreed the principles which will govern the fight against terrorism for the future. EC heads of Government will examine progress made at their next meeting. The Government will play their full part in ensuring that solidarity among the Twelve in the face of terrorist threat is put into practice at every level of co-operation.

Mr. Oleg Gordievsky

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any representations have been received from the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics regarding the case of Mr. Oleg Gordievsky.

Mr. Renton: It is not our practice to comment on security matters.

Disarmament

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responses he has had to the paper, "Seismic Monitoring for a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban", submitted to the conference on disarmament in July 1985; and if he will make responses available in the Library.

Mr. Renton: At the conference on disarmament in Geneva there has been only one technical paper (CD712) directly commenting on the United Kingdom's paper. As with all CD papers, a copy is available in the Library of the House.

There have been a number of comments in the United Kingdom on CD610. Most recently, "Modern Geology" published a number of articles on it; a copy is in the Library of the House. These articles were noted in the national press at the time, including a commentary in the Guardian of 20 November. This, like the articles, was misleading in several respects.

The "dramatic new evidence" presented under the title of "Earthquake in Kazakhstan" is neither new nor dramatic. The seismograms illustrated are from seismic disturbances that took place seven and a half years ago, on 14 September 1979. Contrary to claims in the articles, the seismograms in question were not obtained by high frequency means. The signals were recorded and detected automatically using the standard processing system at the NORSAR array in Norway. NORESS, the high frequency array, had not been installed at that time, and data from high frequency systems are not available for these seismic disturbances. In any case, there is some evidence that the high frequency content of signals caused by small earthquakes is rather like that from similarly sized nuclear explosions in regions of similar geology.

The earthquake occurred not in Kazakhstan as stated, but in the Kamchatka region, some 5,800 km distant. Geological differences and the size of the seismic disturbances rather than high frequency detection techniques, are responsible for differences in the frequency content of the seismogram. As stated in the articles, a spike-like feature identified in the lower trace originated from Kazakhstan. However we cannot be certain that it was caused by a nuclear explosion; the USSR does not, as a matter of policy, announce such tests. It would hardly be surprising if the signals from two widely separated regions differ in their characteristics.

In response to technical comments on the United Kingdom paper, the Government prepared in mid-1986 a response to press and "Modern Geology" reports. I am placing a copy of this in the Library of the House. It deals with three main areas:

(a) claims for the effectiveness of high frequency monitoring;

(b) claims that the M_b:M_s criterion provides a reliable and effective means of distinguishing between nuclear explosions and natural seismic events;

(c) claims that unannounced nuclear explosions in the US had been detected in Sweden, when in actual fact the explosions in question were detected and reported in the US and the relevant information then passed and republished by interested circles in Sweden.

Chemical Warfare

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of Sate for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies have been made

of the likely effects on progress towards a chemical warfare treaty of the French Government's proposal to develop a binary chemical weapon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) on 9 December 1986. There has been encouraging progress in the negotiations towards a global ban on chemical weapons under British Chairmanship of the ad hoc committee in 1986.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of Sate for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government last tabled proposals on verification for a chemical warfare treaty; what progress has been made on those proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: A British paper on the crucial verification issue of challenge inspection was tabled when I visited the conference on disarmament on 15 July 1986. Our proposals have been welcomed by many delegations and are currently under discussion in the negotiations in Geneva.

Terrorism

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to raise with Mr. Peter Barry, the Irish Foreign Minister, the decision by the Government of the Irish Republic to defer ratification of the European convention on terrorism until December 1987; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Visa Regulations

Mr. Greville Janner asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received opposing the new visa regulations.

Mr. Eggar: We have received a number of letters from student and other organisations and from members of the public.

Mr. Greville Janner asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the implementation of the new visa regulations has cost.

Mr. Eggar: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 24 October 1986.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

High Court Judges

55. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor proposes to increase the number of judges sitting in the Queen's Bench division of the High Court.

The Solicitor-General: The number of judges in the Queen's Bench division was increased by two, from 49 to 51, in September 1986. The number of High Court judges overall and within each division is kept under continuing review.

Anglo Irish Agreement

57. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Attorney-General what recent conversations he has had with the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic within the framework of the Anglo Irish Intergovernmental conference or otherwise.

The Attorney-General: I have had two recent conversations with the Attorney-General for the Republic of Ireland concerning matters of common concern.

State Security

58. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Attorney-General in how many cases during the last 12 months he has acted on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in seeking injunctions to prevent the publication of books.

The Attorney-General: I have acted in two such cases: the Peter Wright manuscript—proceedings were in fact instituted in 1985—and the Joan Miller book "One Girl's War".

Crown Prosecution Service

59. **Mr. Whitfield** asked the Attorney-General how many representations to the Director of Public Prosecutions he has received for or on behalf of chief officers of police about the standard of service provided by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: I have received no representations of the nature mentioned in the question. The Director of Public Prosecutions has established a senior liaison committee as a forum for discussion of matters of mutual interest to the Crown Prosecution Service and other agencies within the criminal justice system, including the Association of Chief Police Officers. Discussions with ACPO in that forum have been wide ranging and constructive. Press reports critical of the CPS and apparently based on comments by individual police officers do not accurately reflect the working relationship between the Crown Prosecution Service and the police service.

60. **Mr. Burt** asked the Attorney-General how many staff have been recruited to the Crown Prosecution Service since 1 April.

The Attorney-General: Recruitment in the Crown Prosecution Service has been conducted in accordance with the practice within the Civil Service. Thus, clerical and support staff, including those in the secretarial group, have been recruited locally under delegated arrangements. Recruitment in respect of all other grades has been by means of national open competition under the auspices of the Civil Service Commission. The combined figures for local and central recruitment for the period 1 April 1986 to 31 December 1986 are as follows:

Category	*Number recruited*
Clerical Support Staff (including Secretarial Group)	395
Executive Support Staff	242
Lawyers (141 Crown Prosecutors 34 Senior Crown Prosecutors)	175
	812

Much of the recruitment activity has been directed towards London and the figures for London, included in those given previously, are as follows:

		Number
Clerical Support Staff		180
Executive Support Staff		195
Lawyers		
Crown Prosecutors	62	
Senior Crown Prosecutors	15	77
		452

These figures do not include those staff who transferred to the Crown Prosecution Service under the transfer of staff regulations.

So far as lawyer posts are concerned, arrangements have been made for the Civil Service Commission to continue to organise monthly competitions. These will be confined largely to entry at Crown prosecutor level and will chiefly be for allocation within London. Recent competitions have continued to yield approximately 100 applications per round and there is no reason to suppose that the recruitment of lawyers will fall away. The Crown Prosecution Service will therefore continue to apply rigorous standards to recruitment seeking to engage only the most suitable candidates.

Recruitment of support staff has resulted in the Crown Prosecution Service being fully up to complement with ad hoc recruitment being used solely to replace natural wastage or to meet increases in complement.

Serious Fraud

61. **Mr. William Powell** asked the Attorney-General whether any preparatory steps are being taken with a view to the establishment of the serious fraud office provided for in clause 1 of the Criminal Justice Bill; and whether he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Following the Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill, an interdepartmental working group chaired by my legal secretary has been established to oversee the necessary preparatory work. This will include drawing up a comprehensive assessment of its functions, planning its mode of operation and liaising with police service on matters of mutual interest. In addition, preliminary steps will be taken on staffing arrangements and as regards accommodation. But the role of the working group will be an interim one until it is possible to appoint senior managers and for them to assume effective control.

Mr. Rupert Allason

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General whether he will prosecute Mr. Rupert Allason under section 7 of the Official Secrets Act 1920 for inciting Mr. Arthur Martin to break his duty of confidentiality on security matters to the Crown in respect of information to be included in his book "A Matter of Trust."

The Attorney-General: No.

117 Pierce Avenue, Solihull

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the problems concerning the title to the property known as 117 Pierce Avenue, Solihull (Treasury Solicitor ref. Bv 2358/86/Bs) and the delay in selling that property.

The Attorney-General: The property to which the hon. Member refers was originally offered for sale by a receiver appointed by the Court of Protection. When the owner of the property died in August 1986 the receiver's authority ceased; and since it appeared that she had died intestate and without known relatives the matter was referred to the Treasury Solicitor for consideration whether the estate fell to be administered by him on behalf of the Crown by virtue of section 46(vi) of the Administration of Estates Act 1925.

The Treasury Solicitor's inquiries are proceeding, but in order to avoid delay he proposes to apply to the court for authority to sell the property to the proposed purchasers or, if they are unable or unwilling to complete, on the advice of the district valuer.

"The Sun"

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Attorney-General what factors he took into account in deciding not to grant his consent to the prosecution of the editor of *The Sun* and the cartoonist who signs his name as Franklin in respect of an allegation that they had committed on offence contrary to section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I took into account all the relevant circumstances of the case when reaching my decision. These circumstances included as one—I stress one—of the facts, a mistake in my Department which arose from a misunderstanding between myself and an official and led to the complainants and the staff at *The Sun* being wrongly informed that I had decided to prosecute. The true position was that I simply wished police enquiries to be made.

Newspaper Cartoons

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Attorney-General what criteria he uses in deciding whether a newspaper cartoon is sufficiently inflammatory to justify his consent to a prosecution under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I take my decisions on the basis, first, of an objective assessment of whether sufficient evidence is available to prove the offence. On this and other aspects of a case, I of course usually have the advantage of the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions. So far as cases under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936 are concerned, whether they relate to a newspaper cartoon or material of any other kind, it is necessary to show that there has been a publication of matter which is threatening, abusive or insulting. A publication must also be such that, having regard to all the circumstances, hatred is likely to be stirred up by the material in question against a racial group in Great Britain. Here the relevant factors are likely to include the nature of the publication, its circulation, the market at which it is aimed, as well as any special sensitivity prevailing at the time of publication which might influence the effect on those who read it of the material in question.

Having satisfied myself that the evidence is sufficient, I consider, secondly, whether, in the particular case, the

public interest requires a prosecution. Each case is judged on its own facts and I have no hard and fast rule. However, I am very much aware of the damage to harmounious race relations and good order which may flow from the type of material covered by the section.

TRANSPORT

London Regional Transport

13. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will raise the matter of the provision of bus shelters when he next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: Probably not.

30. **Mr. Stanbrook** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport, he will raise with him the subject of bus services in London.

Mr. David Mitchell: I would expect this to be among the items which are discussed when I next meet Dr. Bright.

31. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has held recent discussions with London Regional Transport on improvements in bus and underground services in the Greater London area.

Mr. David Mitchell: This was among the items discussed when my right hon. Friend last met Dr. Bright at the London Passenger Transport Group.

M11 (Service Areas)

14. **Mr. Haselhurst** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received any representations about the siting of the M11 services area at Birchanger; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A number of representations have been received from and on behalf of local people. The petition to this House was published on 31 October. We have considered the points made. We think the chosen site is satisfactory.

Car Commuting

15. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any estimates of the increase in car commuting caused by each 10 per cent. increase in rail fares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The impact of fare increases will vary from area to area depending on local commuting conditions and rail market share.

Greater Manchester

16. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has for major road projects in the Greater Manchester area; and what are the implications for employment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Contracts worth £70 million have already been let for widening M63 and for construction of the Portwood to Denton section of the Manchester outer ring road. There are plans for over £200 million further investment in major road projects.

One of the major objectives of all national trunk road schemes is to help economic recovery by reducing transport costs. Completion of the ring road will assist the economic development of Greater Manchester by improving communications within the area.

Regional Airports

17. **Mr. Burt** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the growth in traffic at regional airports since 1979.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Total passenger traffic at United Kingdom airports other than those serving the London area grew by 25 per cent. between 1979 and 1985 and figures for the first nine months of 1986 show an increase of 13 per cent. over 1985.

Rail Electrification

18. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any request from British Rail to approve investment for the electrification of the railway between Bradford and Leeds.

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

Drink Driving

19. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Christmas drink driving campaign.

Mr. Moore: Our message that drivers who drink are a menace to society captured wide public support. Nevertheless, figures of positive breath tests over the holiday period still show that too many drivers are putting their own and other people's lives at risk. Though it is too early to assess the impact of the campaign, a full analysis will be undertaken when all the data are available later in the year.

Lost Property

20. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend regulations to allow public transport authorities a greater degree of flexibility in regard to the requirements that charges be made to allow the return of lost property.

Mr. David Mitchell: This is not necessary. The amending regulations made in 1981 already give operators power to waive charges for the return of lost property if they wish.

Airline Competition

21. **Mr. McCrindle** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to review his airline competition policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: No. The Government's policy remains as set out in the 1984 White Paper on airline competition policy.

Road Safety

22. **Mr. Silvester** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further action after the Christmas drink/drive campaign he proposes in road safety publicity.

Mr. Moore: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton).

Physically Disabled People

23. **Mr. Stern** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the facilities available for the transport of the physically disabled in the light of the Transport Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Act requires local authorities to take into account the transport needs of people who are elderly or disabled, and provides grant-making powers. The Department will continue to supply technical and policy guidance for operators, working closely with the new Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Vehicle Registrations

24. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the total number of heavy goods vehicle and motor car registrations, respectively; and how these figures compare with ten years previously.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At December 1985 the licensed stock of heavy goods vehicles in Great Britain was 432,000, which is 23 per cent. below the 1975 figure. These fewer vehicles moved 11 per cent. more tonne kilometres of goods than in 1975. Over the same period the stock of cars increased by 23 per cent. to 16¼ million.

A33 (Swallowfield—Basingstoke)

25. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give consideration to proposals for the trunking of the A33 between Swallowfield, near Reading and Basingstoke.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our recent review of the existing national network did not identify this length of the A33 as a candidate for trunk road status.

Manchester Airport

26. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what decisions his Department has taken regarding the Manchester airport rail link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: None so far. We welcome the cost-sharing agreement between Greater Manchester PTA, Manchester Airport PLC and British Rail, reached last October. We understand that the parties wish to seek grant from the European regional development fund. We still await their application for that.

Channel Tunnel

27. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on the progress being made in the Channel tunnel project and on steps being taken to safeguard security of passengers travelling through the tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Channel tunnel project remains on target for the commencement of construction next summer, subject of course to enactment of the Channel Tunnel Bill. The British and French Governments and the Anglo-French Intergovernmental Commission and Safety Authority will ensure that acceptable arrangements are made for the security and safety of passengers.

Buses

28. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the mileage currently served by buses; and how this compares with January 1985.

Mr. David Mitchell: Detailed figures are not yet available, but preliminary estimates suggest that service levels have been broadly maintained over the country as a whole.

Heavy Lorries

29. **Mr. Norris** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the effect of the increase in maximum lorry weights to 38 tonnes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We estimate that the extra capacity of 38 tonne vehicles allowed road transport needs in 1985 to be met with 5,000 fewer lorries, 250 million fewer vehicle miles and between 2 and 3 per cent. less road damage.

West Yorkshire

32. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current level of expenditure as determined by his Department for public transport in West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Under the procedures provided by the Rates Act 1984 the expenditure level for West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority for 1986-87 was redetermined at £61·3 million on 20 December 1985. My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State explained the considerations relevant to this decision in reply to a question on that date from my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). I understand the PTA's budgeted expenditure for 1986-87 is £61·288 million.

TRANSPORT

British Rail (Rolling Stock)

33. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the condition of rolling stock currently employed by British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail has invested substantially in new rolling stock since we took office. The condition of existing rolling stock is a management matter for British Rail, but we have agreed with it standards of internal and external carriage cleaning and will be monitoring its achievement closely.

Severnside

34. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will pay an early visit to Severnside to gather evidence at first hand on future transport developments in the area.

Mr. Moore: I shall be pleased to visit Severnside in future when our proposals for a second Severn crossing have progressed further. At present I have no plans for such a visit.

Traffic Pollution (London)

35. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on traffic and pollution in London of coach deregulation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The overall effect of deregulated coach services on traffic and pollution in London has been negligible. Boroughs have powers to make traffic orders to deal with local problems.

Motorway Driving

36. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce measures to seek to afford protection to motorway drivers from other drivers who harass them from behind.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department takes every opportunity to warn drivers of the dangers of driving too close. Advice is given in publicity and in the Highway Code and the manual "Driving". A simple rule—"leave two seconds between your vehicle and the one in front"—tells drivers the minimum safe gap.

"Keep your distance" is also used on experimental signs recently installed on M25, and about to be installed on M1. We shall monitor the effects.

Lorry Ban (London)

37. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the chairman or any representative of the London Residuary Body regarding its role as agent for the London boroughs in the operation of the London lorry ban.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None. How the London Residuary Body discharges the agency role for London boroughs is not a matter for me.

Road Schemes (London)

38. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many road schemes in London are currently under construction and assisted by transport supplementary grant from his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The TSG settlement for the current year covers 23 major schemes worth £250 million. These are:

		£ million
Bexley	Bexleyheath Northern relief road	4·5
Bromley	Bromley High street stage 2	20·5
Ealing, Hillingdon and Hounslow	Hayes bypass	51·9
Enfield and Haringey	North-south route	78·3
Greenwich	Beresford street/Plumstead road	0·7
	Woolwich High street improvement	2·4
	Woolwich road widening stage 1	2·2
Harrow	Roxborough bridge	9·7
Havering	A118 Romford relief road stage 1	11·1
Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster	Harrow road/Ladbroke Grove	3·1
Kingston	Town centre relief road	22·8
Merton	Mitcham town centre	4·5
	Church road, Mitcham	7·2
Newham	Docks cut route	3·7
	High street/Romford road junction	0·8
Redbridge	A118 diversion	3·9
Southwark	Old Kent road/Albany road	3·0
	Old Kent road/Canal bridge	4·4
Sutton	Town centre gyratory	2·2
Waltham Forest	Hoe street/Selbourne road	2·4
Wandsworth	Wangas estate relief road	4·3
	York road improvement	3·0
	Nine Elms lane improvement	2·3

Proposals for 1987-88 include continued support for these schemes and support for a further seven schemes worth £61 million.

This year TSG is helping important borough programmes of minor improvement schemes and traffic management measures worth £10 million. These should

benefit all classes of traffic and reduce accidents. We propose to accept for grant £16 million of schemes of this sort in 1987-88.

Driving Tests

39. **Mr. Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to reduce the waiting time for driving tests.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have been acting to reduce the waiting lists for driving tests. The number of examiners has been increased by 180 — 14 per cent. — since the beginning of 1985. Queues for tests have been brought down on average from 18 weeks to 15 weeks. They are still too long. We aim by continuing recruitment of examiners to reduce the average to 11 weeks this year.

River Crossing (Dartford)

40. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when work is expected to begin on the proposed third river crossing at Dartford.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Construction of the new crossing is expected to begin early in 1988 subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation.

National Bus Company

41. **Mr. Forth** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many National Bus Company subsidiaries have been sold to their managers.

Mr. David Mitchell: Of the 13 National Bus Company subsidiaries which have so far been privatised, 12 have been bought out by their own managements. In most cases employees are being given the opportunity to acquire shares in the businesses.

Bus Services

42. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what impact he expects the full deregulation of bus services on 25 January 1987 to have on fare levels.

48. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Transport by how much he expects the costs of public transport to change once the effects of over registration of commercial services under the Transport Act 1985 have been removed.

Mr. David Mitchell: The long-term effect of introducing competition into local bus services will be to make their costs lower than they would otherwise have been. This saving will be split between the passenger and the ratepayer in varying proportion.

45. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the extent of over-registration of bus services under the Transport Act 1985.

47. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what indications he has as to likely changes in the level of commercial registration of bus services after 25 January 1987.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is now clear that there will be little change in the overall level of bus services on 26 January. Indeed, the number of new services registered to start on that date is larger than the number of services withdrawn.

50. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effects of the deregulation of the bus services under the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. David Mitchell: Deregulation and the introduction of competition have enabled local authorities overall to make substantial savings in subsidy to operators from the rates. Service levels have been broadly maintained with a few exceptions and improved in many places, particularly through the introduction of minibuses, which are now operating in over 150 towns and cities throughout the country.

Rail Fares

43. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail concerning fare increases.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has had several discussions with the chairman of British Rail recently, some of which have touched on fares.

44. **Mr. Bagier** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assumptions were made as to the likely implications for fare levels when his Department set the financial framework for British Rail for 1987-88.

Mr. David Mitchell: The cash ceiling for the 1987-88 PSO grant has not yet been set; but BR's external financing limit for that year was announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement. It is for BR to decide on the level and pattern of fares in the light of the EFL and of the general objectives my right hon. Friend has given it.

46. **Mr. Ron Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria he proposes to use in deciding whether British Rail fare increases to fund enhancements in the quality of the service and increases in investment are minor and modest; and if he will make a statement.

49. **Mr. David Mitchell:** Fares increases are a matter for British Rail. Where fares are raised to reflect improved quality or enhanced investment, I am sure the board will want to consider both the cost of the improvements and the need to retain the custom of passengers.

Scotland (Highlands Region)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he is currently considering for the improvement of communications between the Highlands region of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Mitchell: The board of British Rail has not put any proposals to me.

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of transport.

Mr. Moore: Substantial progress was made during the United Kingdom presidency on a number of important transport issues. The Council took a notable step forward in maritime transport by reaching agreement on four regulations which lay the foundations of a common

shipping policy. These measures will liberalise the Community's international trades, establish a competition regime for shipping and enable the Community to take concerted action to combat protectionism from third countries and to counter unfair pricing practices particularly from state trading lines. The liberalisation of the Community's international trades is particularly significant. The regulation provides for the phasing out by the end of 1992 of unilateral cargo reservation laws and discriminatory cargo sharing arrangements in bilateral agreements, establishing freedom to provide services to and from, and between member states. The Council agreed furthermore to build on this achievment by moving straight to the development of further important measures aimed at both the harmonisation of state aids and ways of strengthening the ability of the Community shipping industry to face the challenge of the highly competitive international shipping market.

On air transport, significant progress was made on a package of measures for a three-year first step towards the 1992 target date for full liberalisation. We obtained unanimous support for our proposals on capacity and a substantial majority for our ideas on market access. A growing number of member states—seven so far—now recognise the importance of allowing cheaper fares. This is a considerable achievement and puts the Belgian presidency in a commanding position to complete a worthwhile first stage package.

On inland transport, the Council agreed to increase each member state's quota of Community road haulage permits by 15 per cent. in 1987. A proposal for a further increase of up to 40 per cent. for 1987 could not be adopted partly because the European Parliament had not issued an opinion, but adoption should be possible early in the Belgian presidency. The Council also agreed a regulation allocating 90 million ecu — about £66 million — to transport infrastructure projects in member states, including two in the United Kingdom. Directives were adopted to streamline procedures for goods traffic at intra-Community frontiers and to ease restrictions on certain combined transport operations. The Council also agreed a framework for future Community policy on railway finances and asked the Commission to prepare a report on port finances with a view to ensuring greater transparency of port accounts.

A1-M1 Link (Battle of Naseby)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received notice of historical evidence to indicate the site and extent of the main battle area of the battle of Naseby; which historians and other experts have supplied such evidence; what indication the evidence so supplied has given as to the extent to which the proposed A1-M1 link road would cut through the site of the main battle area; and whether he will place that evidence, together with any relevant plans and maps, in the Library before he reaches his conclusions on the report of the Inspector who conducted the inquiry into the proposals for that link road.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The issue was debated at length at the public inquiry. Those who gave evidence included Mr. William Seymour, Brigadier Peter Young, Mr. David Chandler, Professor Austin Woolrych and Colonel H. C. B. Rogers. The inspector's report has been received and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport must now be allowed to reach a decision in the light of the evidence and of the inspector's recommendations. They hope to be able to announce their decision next month. Copies of the inspector's report and of appended documents will be made available in the usual way.

A46 (Road Accidents)

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents occurred on the stretch of the A46 between Lincoln and Newark in each of the last five years; and how many people were injured and killed in these accidents.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Details of the accident record and casualties on the A46 trunk road between Lincoln city and Newark boundaries since 1981 are as follows:

Accident record: A46 between Lincoln and Newark from November 1981 to October 1986

	Lincolnshire *Old A46: City boundary to Lincoln bypass (opened 18 December 1985)*				*A46 bypass to county boundary*				*Nottinghamshire* *A46: Newark town boundary at A1 to county boundary*			
	PIA's	*Casualties*			*PIA's*	*Casualties*			*PIA's*	*Casualties*		
		F	*Se*	*Sl*		*F*	*Se*	*Sl*		*F*	*Se*	*Sl*
November 1981 to October 1982	20	0	7	14	17	0	8	21	5	0	1	7
November 1982 to October 1983	22	2	5	22	5	1	9	3	6	0	0	9
November 1983 to October 1984	9	1	0	10	10	0	2	12	9	0	2	11
November 1984 to October 1985	16	0	4	17	7	0	2	19	9	1	5	9
November 1985 to October 1986	11	1	3	11	17	0	5	18	12	1	11	14
Five years (60 months)	78	4	19	74	56	1	26	63	41	2	19	50

Key:
PIA —Personal injury accident.
F —Fatal.
Se —Serious.
Sl —Slight.

Channel Tunnel

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the potential employment benefits of *(a)* the Channel tunnel rail-link and *(b)* the Channel tunnel rail terminal at Waterloo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The investments which BR plans to make in providing passenger and freight services through the Channel tunnel will generate additional employment, both at the construction phase and in the operation of through rail services when the tunnel is opened. BR estimates that the following new jobs will be created:

(i) construction of fixed works (from mid-1988 to mid-1993): about 1,650 jobs per annum.
(ii) construction of rolling stock (from early 1988 to mid-1992): about 2,200 jobs per annum.
(iii) operational phase (from mid-1993): about 1,500 jobs in the first year of operation, increasing as the level of services expands in subsequent years.

These totals include jobs which are likely to be created at the proposed Waterloo terminal. BR estimates these at about 350 per annum during the constructional phase, and about 550 in the first year of operation.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Seafarers (Training)

Sir Paul Bryan asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* listing those educational establishments approved by his Department in the United Kingdom offering courses relevant to the training of professional seafarers, the type of course available at each, the number of students undertaking such courses at the most recent available date and in 1980 and the proportion of such students which he estimates to be of British nationality.

Mr. Walden: Information in the form requested is not readily available.

Advanced courses in public sector further and higher education in England are required to be approved individually by the Secretary of State. There is no corresponding power or requirement for the approval of institutions or for non-advanced courses.

The following table lists enrolments on courses in nautical science and marine engineering in public sector further and higher education establishments covered by the Department's annual further education statistical record. Figures on nationality are not available and the table therefore shows the percentage of students whose domicile was in the United Kingdom. Enrolments on non-advanced Department of Transport certificate courses in nautical science increased mainly due to extra take-up on courses in basic sea survival and first aid.

England

Department of Transport Certificates	*Nautical Science*				*Marine Engineering*			
	1980-81		*1985-6*		*1980-81*		*1985-86*	
	Enrolments	*Per cent. of United Kingdom domicile*	*Enrolments*	*Per cent. of United Kingdom domicile*	*Enrolments*	*Per cent. of United Kingdom domicile*	*Enrolments*	*Per cent. of United Kingdom domicile*
Advanced	542	89	546	82	477	90	465	70
Non-advanced	833	87	1,437	87	456	94	326	53
Other qualifications (not necessarily for professional seafarers)								
Advanced	352	67	574	86	69	96	287	73
Non-advanced	4,675	98	3,418	98	1,835	94	667	87

In addition, there were the following enrolments on non-advanced courses at colleges of the National Sea Training Trust.

	1980–81	*1985–86*
Short full-time courses		
Junior deck trainees	706	154
Junior catering trainees	696	202
Adult engine room ratings	183	0
Adult seamanship ratings	1,392	340
One day courses		
Personal survival	1,034	255

Few of these students were from overseas.

Information for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

City Technical Colleges

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many *(a)* business and industrialists *(b)* local authorities *(c)* educational institutions and charities and *(d)* other potential sponsors have been contacted by his office with proposals for the establishment of city technology colleges.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department initially contacted some 1,800 companies, all English local education authorities, some 200 charitable organisations and a wide variety of other organisations with an interest in education. Since the announcement of the proposal in October, the Department has had a considerable number of contacts with many organisations and interested individuals, and these discussions are continuing.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the educational institutions, churches, trade unions and other non-commercial organisations that his Department contacted with details of the establishment of city technology colleges.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend initially informed local education authorities in England, leading religious educational bodies, teacher trade unions and a number of other organisations of his proposals for the establishment of city technology colleges. Since the original announcement the Department has had further contacts with some of these bodies.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the current costs per year of a city technology college; and what proportion of these costs will be on staff salaries.

Mrs. Rumbold: At current prices it is estimated that the annual current cost of a city technology college will be of the order of £1·1 million to £1·8 million, depending on local circumstances. The breakdown of actual costs will depend on decisions to be taken by the promoters of CTCs. If they are in line with the present practice of local education authorities we would estimate that 80 per cent. of annual current expenditure would go on staff costs.

GCSE

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to make funding available for the introduction of GCSE into post-school education; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for local authorities to determine the resources made available for GCSE provision, whether in schools or in further education. The Government's plans for 1987-88 provide for an increase of 18·8 per cent. in total local authority expenditure compared with the current year; of this some £100 million is intended for GCSE non-teaching costs.

In addition, the Government have directed substantial resources specifically to help meet GCSE-related costs, including £25 million for in-service training for teachers in schools and further education in the financial years 1985-86 to 1987-88; and support for local authority expenditure on books and equipment in schools through education support grants and the Manpower Services Commission in the financial years 1986-87 and 1987-88.

The available resources should enable authorities to ensure that maintained institutions offering GCSE courses can meet the demands of the new examination courses.

CERN

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the financing of the British contribution to CERN.

Mr. Walden: The United Kingdom contribution to CERN budget for the calendar year 1987 is 126·65 million Swiss francs. Provision for the sterling equivalent of this sum will be included in the 1987-88 Estimates for the Science and Engineering Research Council, which will be presented to Parliament in due course.

Teachers Unions

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his latest information as to which of the teachers' unions agree with the employers' side majority proposals; and which do not.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that at the Burnham committee meeting of 7 January only two unions—the NUT and AMMA—confirmed their wish to adopt the proposals made by the majority on the employer's side. The remaining unions—NAS/UWT, NAHT, SHA and PAT—did not. This compares with the four unions which signed the ACAS document on teachers' pay and conditions after the Nottingham/London talks in November, and the five unions which signed the Coventry heads of agreement in July 1986.

ILEA

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the leader of the Inner London Education Authority; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend, the Member for Leeds, North-East (Sir K. Joseph) met a deputation on 10 February 1986 led by the leader of the Inner London Education Authority to discuss the authority's precept limit for 1986-87.

Secondary Education

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in considering the proposed re-organisation of secondary education in West Essex, he will take into account the representations he has received in favour of single sex education and objections to the tertiary college system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Yes. My right hon. Friend will take into account all relevant factors, including the representations and objections that he has received, in his consideration of the statutory proposals.

AIDS

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the chairman of the Medical Research Council's working party on AIDS seeking more resources for AIDS research.

Mr. Walden: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 18 December 1986 to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South West (Mrs. Bottomley) (cols. 666-67) in which he announced that the Medical Research Council is to receive an increase in its grant-in-aid of £1 million a year for AIDS research. That addition is to take effect from 1987-88. Since then my right hon. Friend has discussed the programme of work with the secretary of the Medical Research Council.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to make an order relating to sections 47(5)(*a*)(iii) and 47(7) of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 concerning corporal punishment in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend intends to make regulations under section 47(5)(*a*)(iii) well in advance of the 1987-88 school year. He has no present plans to make regulations under section 47(7).

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils fall under sections 47(6)(*a*), 47(6)(*b*) and 47(6)(*c*) of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 concerning corporal punishment; and how many schools have one or more pupils who are covered by these categories.

Mrs. Rumbold: About 33,000 pupils at 234 schools in England and Wales are likely to come within the terms of section 47(6)(*a*). Under section 47(6)(*b*) we expect that there will be some 500 pupils at the five music and ballet schools in England; the number of pupils placed in independent schools by local education authorities at

January 1985, the latest date for which information is available, was about 15,000. The Department has no information about the number of pupils or schools coming within the scope of section 47(6)(*c*).

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils fall under section 47(5)(*b*) of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 concerning corporal punishment.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collected centrally.

Students

Mrs. Shields asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students left the education system without any qualifications at O level or CSE in 1985-86; and what are the comparable figures for each of the countries in the EEC.

Mr. Dunn: Figures for 1985-86 are not yet available. In 1984-85 it is estimated that 9·4 per cent. of school leavers (69,400) in England left with no O level or CSE qualifications; some of these young people will subsequently have gained qualifications in further education colleges or on the youth training scheme.

Information is not yet available to draw comparable international comparisons in this area.

Teachers (Unions and Employers)

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the latest position regarding negotiations with the teaching unions and the teachers' employers.

Mrs. Rumbold: The local authority employers and teacher unions met on 7 January in the Burnham and CLEA/ST committees. I understand that a majority on each side, but with significant dissenting voices, expressed a wish to adopt the ACAS document of November 1986 if the Government are willing to fund the package contained therein. My right hon. Friend expects to receive formal communications on this subject which he will consider carefully. However his position remains that he intends to see a satisfactory career structure for teachers implemented within the substantial resources which the Government have made available.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the percentage of children aged three to four years attending any form of maintained school, at the latest date, for each local authority.

Mr. Dunn: The percentages of children aged three and four attending maintained schools in each local educattion authority in England in January 1986, the latest date for which figures are available is given below:

Percentage of 3 and 4 year old children attending maintained schools in England. January 1986[1]

	Percentage
Barking	68
Barnet	51
Bexley	26
Brent	62
Bromley	17
Croydon	37
Ealing	44
Enfield	51
Haringey	62
Harrow	32
Havering	37
Hillingdon	50
Hounslow	69
Kingston upon Thames	49
Merton	53
Newham	67
Redbridge	23
Richmond upon Thames	42
Sutton	17
Waltham Forest	51
ILEA	50
Birmingham	59
Coventry	52
Dudley	42
Sandwell	68
Solihull	57
Walsall	79
Wolverhampton	66
Knowsley	56
Liverpool	75
St. Helens	55
Sefton	54
Wirral	47
Bolton	61
Bury	47
Manchester	67
Oldham	63
Rochdale	58
Salford	77
Stockport	40
Tameside	66
Trafford	19
Wigan	54
Barnsley	62
Doncaster	71
Rotherham	55
Sheffield	56
Bradford	52
Calderdale	62
Kirklees	56
Leeds	54
Wakefield	63
Gateshead	57
Newcastle upon Tyne	68
North Tyneside	78
South Tyneside	78
Sunderland	63
Avon	43
Bedfordshire	34
Berkshire	25
Buckinghamshire	18
Cambridgeshire	40
Cheshire	35
Cleveland	64
Cornwall[2]	46
Cumbria	50
Derbyshire	48
Devon	20
Dorset	14
Durham	62
East Sussex	36
Essex	18
Gloucestershire	31
Hampshire	20
Hereford and Worcester	15
Hertfordshire	47
Humberside	48
Isle of Wight	37
Kent	12
Lancashire	44

	Percentage
Leicestershire	30
Lincolnshire	26
Norfolk	31
North Yorkshire	40
Northamptonshire	46
Northumberland	49
Nottinghamshire	50
Oxfordshire	17
Shropshire	31
Somerset	33
Staffordshire	41
Suffolk	28
Surrey	20
Warwickshire	45
West Sussex	8
Wiltshire	16

[1] Full and part time pupils in nursery and primary schools. Ages at January. The number of pupils expressed as percentage of the estimated 3 and 4 year old population. Pupils in maintained special schools are excluded.
[2] Includes the Isles of Scilly.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of children aged three to four years attending any form of maintained school at the latest date; what proportion of the total this represents; and how that compares with each of the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: The number and proportion of children aged three and four attending maintained schools in England in January 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, and for the preceding five years was as follows:

January each year	Number of children attending maintained schools[1]	Percentage[2]
1981	401,000	37
1982	407,256	37
1983	431,886	38
1984	469,946	40
1985	487,849	41
1986	482,760	41

[1] Full and part-time pupils in nursery and primary schools. Ages at January. Comparable data for maintained special schools are not available.
[2] Number of 3 and 4 year old pupils expressed as a percentage of the estimated 3 and 4 year old population.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the expenditure on all maintained schools for under-fives for each of the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: The net recurrent expenditure by local education authorities on under fives in maintained schools for each of the last five years is as follows:

	£ million cash
1981-82	241
1982-83	274
1983-84	296
1984-85	331
[1]1985-86	352

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of children aged three to four-years-old attended maintained schools in the United Kingdom at the latest date, compared with other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Dunn: A study on this topic has recently been published in "Statistical Bulletin 16/86", a copy of which is in the Library.

The table below summarises the available information on both education and on day care (excluding child minders) covering both public and private sectors. Statistics are presented in that form because the division between categories is blurred by differing departmental responsibilities in different countries and by differing levels of Government subsidy to the private sector. Rates for both three to four, and three to five year olds are shown because compulsory schooling starts at age six or seven in the other countries.

Percentage of Age Group: 1982

	Three to Five Year Olds		Three to Four Year Olds	
	Education	Day Care[1]	Education	Day Care[1]
Belgium	97	—	96	—
Canada	34	[2]9	13	[2]10
Denmark	[2]11	[3]65	[2]—	[3]66
Finland	—	33	—	32
France	97	—	95	—
Germany	60	—	51	—
Ireland	[4]50	14	[4]27	n/a
Italy	[5]76	—	[5]76	—
Japan	44	[6]27	33	[6]26
Luxembourg	62	—	43	—
Netherlands	66	17	50	25
Norway	n/a	n/a	[4]—	27
Sweden	35	n/a	3	27
United Kingdom	[7]61	27	43	40
USA	52	n/a	36	4

n/a Not available
— Nil, negligible or not applicable
[1] Includes day nurseries, playgroups, kindergartens and other grouped provision where these occur. Excludes care supervised by a childminder or relative.
[2] 1984.
[3] 1983.
[4] 1981.
[5] Estimated.
[6] 1979.
[7] Includes nursery schools and all pupils aged up to five in primary schools.

Pre-School Education

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number and percentage of three to four-year-olds having some form of pre-school education in the private, maintained or voluntary sector.

Mr. Dunn: The number and percentage of three and four year olds in England in January 1986 who were having pre-school education in the private or maintained sectors are given below. Information on pre-school education in the voluntary sector is not collected centrally.

	Pupils aged 3 and 4[1]	Percentage[2]
Private Sector[3]	28,643	2
Maintained Sector[4]	482,760	41
Total	511,403	43

[1] Full and part-time pupils. Ages at January 1986.
[2] Pupil numbers expressed as a percentage of the estimated 3 and

4 year old population.

[3] Non-maintained nursery and independent schools. Non-maintained special schools excluded.

[4] Maintained nursery and primary schools. Maintained special schools excluded.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the Government funding, direct and indirect, for the voluntary sector of under-five education for each of the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: Some LEA expenditure supported through RSG will, over this period, have been directed to provision for under fives in voluntary schools but no breakdown of the amounts involved is available.

Nursery Schools

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of children aged three to four years attending nursery schools at the latest date, broken down for each local authority; and what was the number for the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: The number of children aged three or four attending maintained nursery schools in each local education authority in England in January 1986 (the latest date for which figures are available) and for the preceding five years is given in the table below. Pupils aged three or four in nursery classes in maintained primary schools have been excluded from these figures.

Number of pupils aged 3 and 4 in maintained nursery schools[1]

	January each year					
	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Barking	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Barnet	351	337	384	393	387	361
Bexley	132	171	158	171	169	168
Brent	208	211	222	228	242	162
Bromley	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Croydon	277	266	332	373	382	384
Ealing	456	556	538	560	538	518
Enfield	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Haringey	149	153	142	143	150	148
Harrow	46	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Havering	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hillingdon	85	106	101	119	116	117
Hounslow	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kingston-upon-Thames	184	190	190	207	201	202
Merton	162	169	164	159	148	133
Newham	869	847	897	843	821	860
Redbridge	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Richmond-upon-Thames	40	47	41	55	38	39
Sutton	217	206	219	217	223	215
Waltham Forest	394	400	419	369	330	290
ILEA	3,083	3,141	3,272	3,440	3,539	3,491
Birmingham	1,653	1,753	1,769	1,575	1,714	1,781
Coventry	249	249	269	288	288	305
Dudley	495	499	432	448	467	450
Sandwell	149	125	131	112	33	138
Solihull	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Walsall	516	525	539	499	564	483
Wolverhampton	665	617	681	684	714	667
Knowsley	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Liverpool	349	329	387	327	337	366
St. Helens	42	61	50	48	52	50
Sefton	188	229	252	234	225	289
Wirral	211	207	190	214	164	172
Bolton	395	415	424	426	444	467
Bury	95	85	124	112	105	101
Manchester	237	227	249	274	327	344
Oldham	177	80	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rochdale	701	729	770	867	837	820
Salford	468	460	442	461	451	491
Stockport	534	578	594	609	626	605
Tameside	198	199	241	230	229	246
Trafford	78	76	76	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wigan	177	151	130	119	117	119
Barnsley	264	102	132	131	144	150
Doncaster	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rotherham	331	332	331	340	365	352
Sheffield	583	615	656	633	627	617
Bradford	578	569	489	490	522	425
Calderdale	70	71	97	91	95	87
Kirklees	619	750	750	599	603	649
Leeds	240	240	265	234	254	243

	January each year					
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Wakefield	440	437	431	465	454	468
Gateshead	99	35	43	41	41	50
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	388	376	408	427	427	412
North Tyneside	189	187	256	260	255	275
South Tyneside	671	539	663	652	717	597
Sunderland	639	715	852	856	863	713
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Avon	1,336	1,200	1,259	1,258	1,207	1,250
Bedfordshire	1,127	1,205	1,279	1,280	1,317	1,228
Berkshire	1,649	1,646	1,710	1,770	1,878	1,877
Buckinghamshire	488	497	504	516	513	514
Cambridgeshire	520	532	560	563	554	593
Cheshire	614	663	698	706	743	748
Cleveland	349	355	368	309	231	117
Cornwall	83	88	85	85	87	76
Cumbria	504	474	479	560	508	556
Derbyshire	908	961	1,010	1,013	1,015	995
Devon	145	139	137	137	143	238
Dorset	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Durham	1,796	1,888	2,018	2,072	2,055	2,038
East Sussex	226	236	233	223	245	269
Essex	220	219	238	229	242	237
Gloucestershire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hampshire	209	234	226	220	234	236
Hereford and Worcester	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hertfordshire	1,536	1,598	1,651	1,656	1,676	1,677
Humberside	851	847	908	832	817	855
Isle of Wight	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kent	63	65	72	52	72	62
Lancashire	2,399	2,379	2,513	2,627	2,683	2,630
Leicestershire	48	47	48	49	49	49
Lincolnshire	314	331	349	361	324	254
Norfolk	320	291	329	318	336	353
North Yorkshire	260	267	287	295	285	284
Northamptonshire	426	453	455	463	457	469
Northumberland	98	89	127	101	117	127
Nottinghamshire	374	383	399	473	446	441
Oxfordshire	775	807	740	527	483	487
Shropshire	218	221	136	161	147	156
Somerset	25	28	27	n/a	n/a	n/a
Staffordshire	1,668	1,647	1,718	1,766	1,760	1,765
Suffolk	119	119	142	145	138	150
Surrey	452	453	472	467	481	369
Warwickshire	522	528	561	594	604	662
West Sussex	372	396	419	414	428	419
Wiltshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	40,355	40,648	42,359	42,265	42,620	42,201

[1] Full and part time pupils. Ages at the previous 31 August.
n/a There were no nursery schools in these local authority areas in the years indicated.

Disabled Students

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students in each of the universities and institutions of higher education in England and Wales are registered disabled; and what proportion they represent of the student population (*a*) in England, (*b*) in Wales and (*c*) in England and Wales.

Mr. Walden: As I explained in my reply on 18 November to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) at columns 137-38, information on disabled students in higher education is not available routinely. However, in 1985 a survey of students with special educational needs was carried out, covering public sector higher education and non-advanced further education in England. The survey estimated that there were some 600 students in public sector higher education who had special educational needs which required additional support or equipment. This represents about 15 per 10,000 students in public sector higher education.

The Open University had just over 2,000 disabled students (3 per cent. of all students) in the undergraduate programme at the start of 1986. Information is not collected for other universities.

Information for individual institutions could only be released with their consent and at disproportionate cost.

Public sector higher education in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

ENVIRONMENT

EC (Environment Policy)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the

achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of environment matters.

Mr. Waldegrave: I chaired the Council of Environment Ministers during the United Kingdom Presidency. At our meeting on 24 November the Council reached agreement on three important directives — motorcycle noise, environmental pollution by asbestos, and the disposal of waste oil. Two other measures, on animal experimentation and on the exchange of information about water quality, were formally adopted. We also adopted resolutions on the Rhine pollution incidents and the fourth environment action programme. Good progress was made on other subjects under discussion. Details of the Council were given in my reply of 27 November 1986 to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire.

The United Kingdom also hosted a successful meeting of the steering committee for the European Year of the Environment in London on 8 December.

A full list of United Kingdom Presidency achievements will be placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Act 1974

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been received by his Department from the Commission for Local Administration about changes in the Local Government Act 1974.

Dr. Boyson: The Commission for Local Adminstration in England submitted review documents to central Government in 1978, 1980 and 1984, formally proposing changes in the 1974 Act. The text of those submissions and of the Government's responses were published in the Commissions annual reports, copies of which are deposited in the Library. The Commission also submitted to the Department its comments on proposals for change made in 1986 by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Adminstration, and the Widdicombe committee of inquiry into the conduct of local government business. The Government are considering those comments in association with the many others that they have received.

Ealing Council

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment upon what evidence the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) based his statement of 19 November, *Official Report*, column 560, concerning the policy and expenditure of Ealing council in relation to the homosexual community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I did not say anything about expenditure on the homosexual community. As for the policies, these are well documented.

Camden Council

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment upon what evidence the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) based his statement of 17 December, *Official Report*, column 1185, concerning the policy of Camden council towards the removal of graffiti; and if he willl make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I understand that a spokesman for Camden borough council has acknowledged that the council give priority to the removal of graffiti of a racists or sexist nature.

ENVIRONMENT

Fluoridation

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the fluoridation schemes which have been put into operation in the United Kingdom since the Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985 was passed and give the cost of those schemes and the number of the populations now affected by them.

Mr. John Patten: Information about fluoridation schemes which have been put into operation in the United Kingdom since the passing of the Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985 is listed below:

Water undertaker	*Fluoridation scheme (identified by name of treatment works)*	*Approximate population served ('000)*	*Approximate capital costs (£'000)*
South Staffordshire Waterworks Company	Cookley	47	88
	Churchill	50	88
	Hagley	30	88
	Bourne Vale	23	88
	Little Hay	20	88
	Pipe Hill	49	88
	Sandhills	18	88
	Shenstone	22	88
	Hampton Loade	595	160
	Seedy Mill	201	150
East Worcestershire Waterworks Company	Childswickham	14	63
Severn-Trent Water Authority	Green Lane	8	24
	Watery Lane	8	35
	Brownshill Green	6	38
Anglian Water Authority	Aswarby	59	25
	Saltersford		55

Radioactive Waste

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the target level for maximum annual radiation exposure of any member of the public to be used by his Department in considering an application for a radioactive waste disposal facility, expressed in millisieverts per year; and when this target level was defined.

Mr. Waldegrave: The target applicable to a single repository at any one time is a risk to an individual in a year equivalent to that associated with a dose of 0·1 mSv. This target was defined in "Disposal Facilities on land for Low and Intermediate Level Radioactive Wastes: Principles for the Protection of the Human Environment", published by HMSO in December 1984.

Rates

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about regional variations in levels of rates, and specifically between London boroughs and county councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I shall answer this question shortly.

Nuclear Radiation

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list showing the various critical groups of members of the public likely to be exposed to the greatest doses of radiation in the vicinity of each licensed nuclear installation for the several kinds of radioactive discharges and emissions during normal operations of the installation; whether, in each case, the critical group is associated with *(a)* direct emissions of radiation from the installation; *(b)* gaseous discharges of radioactive waste from the installation; *(c)* liquid discharges of radioactive waste from the installation and *(d)* any other source of man-made radiation; whether, at each site, an individual may be a member of more than one critical group; what scientific method is adopted for individuals being members of more than one critical group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Housing

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's current estimate of the level of capital expenditure annually required (i) to reverse and (ii) to maintain the current rate of deterioration in the state of repair of the nation's *(a)* public and *(b)* private housing stock.

Mr. Tracey: It is difficult to establish meaningful global estimates of this sort. Primary responsibility for deciding how much to spend on maintaining their houses must rest with the property owners.

Homelessness

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on alleviating homelessness in the light of Professor John Grieve's recent report on homelessness in Greater London, a copy of which has been sent to him; and what is his estimate of the comparative public sector costs of housing homeless families in London by (i) providing them with newly built council dwellings, (ii) providing them with dwellings acquired from the private sector and improved for letting and (iii) providing them with bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the estimated *(a)* net expenditure and *(b)* gross expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless households recorded by local authorities on his Department's RO4 forms for the financial year 1985-86; and if he will give this information for England as a whole, and for each local authority area.

Mr. Tracey: I have today placed the information available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The Contribution of the Private Sector," a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the disabilities study unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to combat the rise in homelessness and bad housing conditions; and if he will make a statement on the recent launch of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless 1987.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many people have been accepted as homeless by each London borough council in 1978 and in each subsequent year;

(2) how many people accepted as homeless were housed in bed-and-breakfast, other temporal accommodation or in permanent accommodation, respectively, by each London borough council in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Enterprise Zones

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement of the progress to date of each of the enterprise zones.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the report, "Enterprise Zone Information 1984-85", published by my Department on 22 October 1986, copies of which were placed in the Library.

Pollution

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning pollution in rivers and canals in Leicestershire.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following an incident affecting the river Soar, my right hon. Friend received a number of representations last year about powers to control water pollution. However as I indicated in my answer on 17 December 1986 at column 580, the existing powers for dealing with pollution in rivers and canals are generally considered adequate. The condition of rivers and canals in the Severn Trent water authority area was described in the recently published report, "River Quality in England and Wales 1985". This showed a net improvement in quality since 1980.

Farm Buildings (Planning Controls)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, *Official Report*, 17 December, column *592*, he will indicate the clarification he has given in reply to the representations received about his proposals to extend planning controls to new livestock buildings and associated structures.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer this question shortly.

Housing Subsidy

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of housing subsidy paid in each of the years 1983-84 to 1986-87 in respect of housing schemes for which his Department's project control approval has been given and which have been financed by financial facilities negotiated by the authorities separate from borrowing under the authorities' housing investment programme allocations.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available. Admissible costs for subsidy purposes relate to capital expenditure undertaken by an authority, irrespective of the methods used to finance that expenditure.

North Bedfordshire Borough Council

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has yet replied to the letter dated 15 December from North Bedfordshire borough council; and if he will reconsider his decision not to meet representatives of the council.

Mr. John Patten: I shall write to the hon. Member.

AIDS

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he gives to local councils on the priority to be attached to spending money on local campaigns to warn people of the dangers of AIDS.

Mr. Ridley: It is for local authorities to assess their own priorities for expenditure.

Pollution Inspectorate (Director)

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the appointment of a director for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; what technical qualifications he proposes to require of the new director; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to the reply*, 1 December 1986, c. 523]: I announced the Government's decision to form Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution within my Department and the Welsh Office on 7 August 1986 and, on 3 December, I placed in the Library of the House copies of the scrutiny report on Government pollution and safety inspection together with the Departments' action plan on that report. I am now able to announce the name of the director designate of the new inspectorate.

I have decided that the inspectorate should be headed, initially, by an experienced senior administrator and I am therefore appointing Mr. Brian Ponsford who is currently the director of waste disposal in my Department, to be the director of the inspectorate with effect from 1 April. Mr. Ponsford will be supported by a chief inspector, radioactive substances and by a chief inspector, air, water and wastes.

These appointments will be made with the agreement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. When the initial managerial and organisational tasks of setting the inspectorate up have been completed, it is our intention that subsequent appointments to head the inspectorate should be made after open competition.

I am presently consulting interested bodies about detailed plans for the inspectorate's organisation and functions.

I believe that the formation of the inspectorate will result in clearer and stronger enironmental control, in taxpayers receiving better value for their money than from the present disperate arrangements, and in industry benefiting from the co-ordinated approach which the inspectorate will have the capacity to develop.

Green Belt (Shopping and Leisure Centres)

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards applications to build large shopping and leisure centres in the green belt.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. 688]: Policy on green belts remains as set out in DOE circular 14/84. My right hon. Friend and I have made it clear that large new shopping and leisure centres do not belong in green belts. When I spoke on 14 October to a conference organised by the Confederation of British Industry, entitled "The Future of Shopping—In or Out of Town?" I said:

"Hardly a week goes by without our reading in the press of yet another vast shopping centre — or more often a shopping and leisure complex — which it is proposed to build in the middle of the green belt. Any such proposal has, of course, to be considered on its merits and in the light of general policy. Some may come to me on appeal, so I must not name names. There is provision, as there must be, for exceptions to be made in very special circumstances. But by way of general policy I would say that the promoters of some of the wilder schemes have no reason to think that they will succeed in breaching green belt policy. We are certainly not opposed to new methods of retailing and the benefits that modern retail stores can bring to the customer. But they do not belong in the green belt. Let that be understood."

I also announced that we proposed to issue a direction requiring local planning authorities to consult the Department before granting permission for certain large new retail stores.

That direction was issued on Thursday 18 December 1986 as an annex to a circular entitled, "Policy on Major Retail Developments" published by HMSO on behalf of my Department and the Welsh Office. A copy of the circular (21/86, Welsh Office 58/86), which also repeats Government policy on planning and large new retail developments, has been placed in the Library.

The direction which is made under articles 10 and 15(4) of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977, requires local planning authorities to consult my Department, or in Wales, the Welsh Office, before approving any development which consists of or includes gross retail floorspace of 250,000 sq feet (23,325 sq metres) or more. It will apply to all relevant planning applications not determined and for which no appeal against non-determination has been made by 1 January 1987. It will apply also to proposals for which local authorities seek "deemed" planning permission under the general regulations.

The direction also specifies the information which local planning authorities are required to provide to the department when carrying out the necessary consultation and prevents the local authority from granting planning permission on the application (or resolving to carry it out) for 21 days. If at the end of that time they have received no further direction from the Secretary of State restricting permission or requiring reference of the application to him. They may proceed to grant permission. It is, however, open to the authority to turn down such an application without reference to the Department.

The existing directions relating to the handling of applications which represent departures from development plans remain in force. However, the request of the Secretaries of State to be informed by local authorities of planning applications for shopping developments outside existing city, town or district centres, involving gross floorspace of 100,000 sq feet or more, is cancelled by the new circular.

In making the direction, we recognise that some major retail schemes now in the planning stage or in prospect raise very wide planning issues which will have effects far beyond the boundaries of an individual planning authority and which in many cases local authorities may find difficult to deal with. We consider it right that we should have a clear opportunity to consider whether such schemes should be called-in for determination by the Secretary of State, although the decision as to whether call-in is appropriate will be taken in the light of the individual circumstances.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing the planned expenditure on the various activities of the common agricultural policy in 1987 before and after the agreement of the Council on 16 December in such a way as to demonstrate the manner in which the saving of £1,200 million in planned expenditure in 1987 is to be achieved.

Mr. Jopling: The Community's draft budget for 1987 includes the following provisions for the common agricultural policy:

	mecu
EAGGF Guarantee	23,003
EAGGF Guidance	1,000
Other CAP expenditure	171
TOTAL	24,174

The decisions taken by the Council on 16 December, including the programme for disposal of butter stocks with delayed reimbursement to member states, will affect 1987 expenditure as follows:

	mecu
Milk	
Lower stocks	−135
Reducation in receipts of coresponsibility levy	+20
Slaughtering of dairy cows (effect on beef sector)	+195
Deferred reimbursement for disposals	−1,050
Total	−970

	mecu
Beef (excluding effects of reforms in milk sector)	– 50
Green rate changes	+ 80
Overall effect	– 940

These figures do not take account of the revised social butter scheme, the effects of which will depend on uptake by member states, or of restrictions on intervention for dairy products on which the Council undertook to take further decisions by the end of February 1987.

The overall savings of 940 mecu—£650 million—are expected to be used to offset other areas of guarantee expenditure where the provision in the 1987 draft budget is likely to be inadequate. The figure of £1,200 million quoted by my hon. Friend is the estimated total saving resulting from the milk package over three years.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current levels of import levy on the food products covered by the common agricultural policy; and what were the comparable levels around the same date in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is set out in the table for the main commodities. The levies shown have been adjusted for the United Kingdom monetary compensatory amounts.

Import levies[1] applicable in the United Kingdom for the main food items covered by the common agricultural policy: third Wednesday in December, 1981-1986

£ tonne

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Common wheat	50	71	51	41	78	116
Barley	48	67	43	44	81	112
Maize	66	69	40	44	65	103
Rice	166	280	267	319	375	421
Sugar (white)[2]	184	251	243	290	289	313
Olive oil	186	186	374	346	476	313
Butter[3]	948	990	1,348	1,185	1,497	1,749
SMP	425	483	572	659	936	939
Beef and veal[4]	999	1,234	1,393	1,442	1,504	1,253
Pigmeat	265	346	341	246	316	524
Poultrymeat	149	199	157	137	172	280
Eggs	159	212	176	149	186	310

Notes:

All figures have been rounded to the nearest £.

[1] The rates of levy vary for different tariff headings. The rates quoted are: beef and veal—carcase; pigmeat—carcase; poultrymeat—70 per cent., chickens; rice—wholly milled long grain; olive oil—virgin; eggs in shell. Levies are shown after adjustment for the UK monetary compensatory amounts where applicable.

[2] In practice the United Kingdom's imports from third countries are normally covered by the Lomé convention and enter the Community levy free.

[3] A special lower rate of levy is applicable to imports of butter from New Zealand.

[4] Most imports of beef from third countries are subject to special arrangements allowing entry at reduced levy rates.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the implications for the disposal of food surpluses of the new national flexibility referred to by the Minister of State in the House on 17 December; if this involves any transfer of responsibilities for funding the disposal of surpluses from the European Community to member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I did not make any reference to national flexibility on the disposal of food surpluses on 17 December. The outcome of the Council on this point was explained in my statement, *Official Report*, column 1211. The question of financial responsibility was dealt with in my reply to my hon. Friend of 19 December 1986 at column 832.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of disposal of surpluses within the European Economic Community in the most recent annual period for which figures are available.

Mr. Gummer: Community expenditure in 1985 on the disposal of products in structural surplus — cereals, sugar, wine, beef and milk products—was 8939 mecu.

Surplus Stocks

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current levels of the surplus stocks of European Economic Community foodstuffs and wine in private and public storage at the most recent date for which figures are available.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 19 December 1986, at column 827.

Food Sales (Intervention Stocks)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if member states will be required to notify the Commission of the prices at which foodstuffs are sold from intervention stocks to particular destinations under the arrangements agreed at the Council meeting on 16 December; and if the member states concerned will require to accept any financial responsibility for such sales.

Mr. Gummer: The Council did not agree any specific stock disposal measures but took note, with approval, of a Commission paper outlining certain plans for the disposal of butter stocks, the details of which have still to be determined. In accordance with normal practice, the Commission itself is responsible for setting prices for sales out of intervention, in the light of the advice of the appropriate management committee. The question of financial responsibility was dealt with in my reply to my hon. Friend on 19 December 1986 at column 832.

Milk Producers (Compensation Scheme)

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek powers to top up from national funds the European Community compensation scheme for milk producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in December agreed to increase the rate of compensation for the Community outgoers scheme by 50 per cent. to a total of 27·5p per litre. I see no justification for topping up beyond this level. I believe the new rate will make the scheme significantly more attractive.

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Jopling: The principal achievement was the progress made at the December Council in reforming the common agricultural policy, as reported fully to the House by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, on 16 December at columns 1211-4. Other achievements are listed in a document being placed in the Library by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

European Community (Production)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the degree of self-sufficiency in each member country of the European Economic Community in the production of milk, beef, wheat, barley, lamb, olive oil and wine.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Information on self-sufficiency in the main agricultural products is contained in the Commission publication "The Agricultural Situation in the Community—1985 Report", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Figures for Spain, Portugal and the Community as a whole are given on page 54. Information for other member states is summarised on pages 249 and 250.

Irradiated Foods

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the outcome of his consideration of the report on safety and wholesomeness of irradiated foods by the Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Services earlier today.

WALES

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of area health boards in rank order according to the number of patients awaiting treatment in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The following tables show the health authorities in Wales ranked according to the numbers of in-patients and according to the numbers of out-patients on hospital waiting lists at 30 June 1986:

Number of in-patients

	Number
Powys	70
Gwynedd	2,013
East Dyfed	2,101
Pembrokeshire	2,794
Clwyd	4,872
West Glamorgan	4,955
South Glamorgan	7,764
Gwent	7,998
Mid Glamorgan	9,090

Number of out-patients

	Number
Powys	654
Pembrokeshire	2,156
Gwynedd	4,145
East Dyfed	5,648
Clwyd	8,822
Gwent	11,359
South Glamorgan	16,239
West Glamorgan	16,296
Mid Glamorgan	18,393

I am concerned at the length of time some people have to wait for hospital treatment in Wales and my officials are working closely with district health authorities to help them find ways of solving the problem. One million pounds has been distributed for 1986-87 and a further £1 million will be made available in 1987-88 to make an immediate impact on the worst bottlenecks.

Monument Clearance

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation procedures apply to a scheduled monument clearance determination; and what experts or organisations his consultations have to involve before a determination can be made.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to my letter of 7 January 1987, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Housing Condition Survey

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column 805, what guidance with regard to the protection of the confidentiality of personal information is given to members of his staff; to what level of juniority such guidance is issued; and if he is satisfied with the operation of this guidance within his Department.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: All permanent, casual and agency staff at all levels employed by the Department are

required to sign the Official Secrets Act. This applies also to retiring civil servants. Every permanent member of staff receives on joining the Department a copy of a handbook for the new civil servant which contains guidance on such matters as the Official Secrets Act and security. All staff are also given a copy of the Department's security rules which draws attention to the Department's handbook and the advice given there on the disclosure of official information.

Beef Farmers (Compensation)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of Wales if he will give details of the pension and compensation package which will be available to beef farmers in Wales who convert their land to other use.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made a statement on 17 December 1986 on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Agricultural Ministers in Brussels between 13 and 16 December 1986.

The Council agreed a package of measures for the beef sector including the retention in the United Kingdom of the beef variable premium for a further two years. This will be of particular benefit to our beef farmers and provide an important element of stability.

At the same meeting the Council broadly approved in outline a package of socio-structural measures. This will be of interest to all farmers—including those in beef production—and, if agreed, will involve a pre-pension scheme linked to the non-cultivation of agricultural land. Detailed decisions on the precise nature of the package have yet to be taken but these are expected to be made in the next few weeks.

Diabetics

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake a study into the possible adverse effects of multiple use of needles and syringes supplied to children suffering from diabetes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: We have no plans to undertake such a study. However, the current arrangements for the supply of disposable syringes on the National Health Service have recently been the subject of discussion between Health Departments and the British Diabetic Association.

Homelessness

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The Contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the disabilities study unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: We have recently received a copy of the report which we will study carefully.

Education (Expenditure)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1980-81 at constant figures.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In 1985-86 the amount spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales was £1,158. The equivalent figure for 1980-81 was £1,041.

Cancer Statistics

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many women died of cervical cancer and breast cancer, respectively, in each health district in 1978 and each year since, giving separately the number of women who died who were over 50 years of age.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The exact information requested is not readily available. The following table shows the number of deaths for women of all ages and for those aged 45 and over:

	Age group	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
		Deaths caused by malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri (ICD 180)							
Clwyd	45+	16	17	17	16	11	18	19	16
	All ages	22	19	20	20	14	22	22	16
East Dyfed	45+	20	12	13	6	8	19	4	15
	All ages	24	18	14	9	9	24	4	19
Pembrokeshire	45+	3	4	2	6	4	4	5	4
	All ages	4	5	2	7	5	6	6	5
Gwent	45+	21	12	10	15	14	11	7	8
	All ages	23	15	14	18	17	14	13	14
Gwynedd	34+	12	22	11	14	8	8	9	11
	All ages	14	24	11	14	11	11	10	13
Mid Glamorgan	45+	27	18	24	22	22	25	22	24
	All ages	30	19	27	23	26	29	27	31
Powys	45+	3	3	6	3	3	3	1	6
	All ages	3	3	7	5	3	3	1	6
South Glamorgan	45+	10	8	10	11	11	13	19	17
	All ages	14	10	10	14	14	18	21	19
West Glamorgan	45+	18	21	20	20	16	8	9	15
	All ages	23	23	20	23	19	9	10	16
WALES	45+	130	117	113	113	97	109	95	117
	All ages	157	136	125	133	118	136	114	139

	Age group	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
		Deaths caused by malignant neoplasm of the breast (ICD 174)							
Clwyd	45+	96	102	96	104	117	118	110	112
	All ages	103	106	104	115	123	125	114	119
East Dyfed	45+	57	60	55	53	53	51	65	71
	All ages	59	63	57	56	55	56	67	77
Pembrokeshire	45+	20	27	25	27	19	22	27	26
	All ages	23	29	25	32	19	23	28	27
Gwent	45+	83	80	98	97	105	98	116	107
	All ages	88	89	109	105	112	103	125	117
Gwynedd	45+	61	64	49	54	66	71	76	62
	All ages	64	70	53	62	67	77	82	64
Mid Glamorgan	45+	113	115	139	124	135	122	135	131
	All ages	122	124	158	129	143	130	148	141
Powys	45+	25	28	22	32	23	29	30	30
	All ages	27	29	27	36	24	30	33	30
South Glamorgan	45+	72	79	79	105	91	100	94	92
	All ages	80	82	91	110	101	105	103	99
West Glamorgan	45+	84	93	84	90	89	93	96	86
	All ages	97	100	89	100	96	99	106	94
WALES	45+	611	648	647	686	698	704	749	717
	All ages	663	692	713	745	740	748	805	768

EMPLOYMENT

Benefits (Payment Delays)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Paymaster General how many applications for judicial review are currently in process regarding delays in payment of benefits by his Department.

Mr. Lee: None.

Free Trade and Enterprise Zones

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate the effect on employment prospects of *(a)* the free trade zones and *(b)* the enterprise zones.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Labour Statistics

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Paymaster General what was the total number of persons in *(a)* employment and *(b)* self-employment at the latest date for which figures are available; and what are the comparable figures for (i) 1983, (ii) 1979 and (iii) 1974.

Mr. Lee: The information is as follows:

Employment in Great Britain[1]

Thousand

	Employees in employment	Self-employed	Employed labour force
June 1974	22,297	1,935	24,577
June 1979	22,638	1,842	24,794
June 1983	20,572	2,160	23,054
June 1986	21,070	2,665	24,056

[1] The sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and HM Forces.

Mr. Meacher asked the Paymaster General (1) what is the percentage in each social class I to V who are unemployed; and by how much has each of these percentages changed since 1979;

(2) what are the latest figures for the unemployment rate for each of the social classes I to V; and what were the corresponding rates in 1979.

Mr. Lee: The available information which comes from the labour force survey is shown in the table below:

Numbers of people without a job and actively looking for work as a percentage of those economically active in each group
Great Britain

Previous social class	Spring 1979 per cent.	Spring 1985 per cent.	Change per cent.
I. Professional etc. occupations	[1]	1·5	[1]
II. Intermediate occupations	1·6	3·5	+1·9
III. Skilled occupations	3·0	6·7	+3·7
IV. Partly skilled occupations	5·2	9·6	+4·4
V. Unskilled occupations	8·2	12·7	+4·5
Not classfied[3]	[2]	[2]	[2]
All unemployed	5·6	10·6	+5·0

[1] No meaningful rate can be computed for this group because of the sampling error that would be involved.

[2] No meaningful figure can be computed for this group.

[3] This category numbered 574,000 in 1979 and 1,155,000 in 1985 and consists of three groups (i) people who had never had a job, (ii) former members of the armed forces, and (iii) those who had been unemployed for a long time (over 1 year in 1979, over 3 years in 1985) who were not asked about their previous occupation.

Mr. Dobson asked the Paymaster General what is the accuracy of figures for unemployment and vacancies in Greater London issued by the Department of Employment.

Mr. Lee: I am satisfied that the monthly unemployment count is an accurate record of those claiming benefits. Less frequent estimates of those without jobs seeking work are available from surveys. Results of the labour force survey conducted in spring 1985 showed some 327,000 people in Greater London without a job and looking for work compared with an average of 399,000 claiming benefits in the same period.

I am also satisfied that the monthly vacancy count is an accurate count of vacancies unfilled at jobcentres. Our latest information suggests that, nationally, about one third of all vacancies are notified to jobcentres. This proportion differs amongst regions.

Mr. Dobson asked the Paymaster General what was the total number of *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* vacancies in Greater London in 1978 on the present method of calculation; and what it has been in each year since.

Mr. Lee: The available information, which is also in the Library is as follows:

Unemployed claimants in Greater London excluding school leavers adjusted for discontinuities and seasonality—November each year

	Number
1978	122,000
1979	104,800
1980	174,600
1981	267,500
1982	305,400
1983	345,900
1984	371,900
1985	386,800
1986	393,300

Unfilled vacancies at job centres[1] in Greater London—November each year

	Number
1980	17,787
1981	18,186
1982	20,039
1983	25,607
1984	27,479
1985	27,706
1986	36,842

[1] Excluding vacancies on Government programmes and vacancies notified to Professional and Executive Recruitment. Including self-employed vacancies.

Mr. Dobson asked the Paymaster General what was the total of people on Department of Employment schemes in Greater London in 1978 and each year since; and how many of these were aged *(a)* 16 to 17, *(b)* 17 to 18, *(c)* 18 to 19 and *(d)* 19 to 20 years.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Mr. Thurnham asked the Paymaster General how many of those eligible for the community programme have benefit entitlement in excess of *(a)* £67 a week and *(b)* £53 a week.

Mr. Lee: Estimates based on survey information about the characteristics of those eligible for the community programme suggest that about 310,000 have benefit entitlements in excess of £67 a week, and about 490,000 have benefit entitlements in excess of £53 a week. The total number of persons eligible for the community programme is in excess of 1·4 million.

Availability for Work Test

Mr. Nicholls asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the operation of the availability for work test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General what safeguards are enjoyed by part-time employees, who have signed variable contracts, which ensure *(a)* full credit for their national insurance contributions, *(b)* full national insurance contributions from their employer, *(c)* that they are covered by the normal redundancy rates and *(d)* that they can work additional hours and for another employer.

Mr. Lee: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is responsible for arrangements concerning national insurance contributions. Entitlement to redundancy payments depends on the employee's length of continuous service and weekly hours of work with each separate employer. The length of continuous service required is two years where the contract of employment provides for at least 16 hours work a week and five years where it provides for at least eight hours a week. If an employee's contractual hours are reduced below 16 but not below eight hours weekly, for not more than 26 weeks, but then raised to 16 hours again, those weeks of reduced hours count for continuous service.

Subject to the agreement of the employer, employees are free to work for more than one employer. The number of hours worked for each would be a matter for negotiation. Part-time employees who work for more than one employer are entitled to a payment from whichever employer makes them redundant, subject to these qualifying conditions.

Training Initiative

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General what is the content of the new training initiative for long-term unemployed; and how this will be divided up between assessment and job training.

Mr. Lee: The new job training scheme (JTS) pilot programmes provide participants with initial assessment, training in occupational skills supported by relevant practical experience and training in job-seeking skills. In addition all managing agents offer training in information technology and self employment skills for those who want and can benefit from these elements. Initial assessment takes place at the beginning of each programme and varies in length. Individual JTS programmes can vary between three and 12 months in length.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General whether those long-term unemployed persons who accept a place on the new training initiative will be regarded as new claimants once the six months training period is completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Those trainees who are unemployed at the end of a training course under the new job training scheme and claim benefit will be regarded as new claimants in the same way as those persons who re-claim after other training courses.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General whether he has any plans to extend the new training initiative beyond the nine pilot areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Yes. A tenth pilot area is starting in Leicester on January 12 1987.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General whether he will make it his policy that those aged over 50 years will be invited to join the new training initiative for long-term unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Priority for places on the new job training scheme pilots is being given to those who are under 25 and unemployed for more than six months, but older long-term unemployed people may also apply.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General what are the numbers of employees in *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time employment in those companies which have accepted trainees under the new training initiative pilot scheme in Dundee *(a)* prior to the trainees joining the companies, and *(b)* one month after the trainees joined the companies.

Mr. Lee: This information is not available.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to his reply, *Official Report*, 18 November, column 427, why his Department cannot advise those long-term unemployed persons who are invited to join the new training initiative in Dundee; and whether they will still qualify for single payments if they accept a place on the scheme.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to his earlier question, about advice given to potential trainees, on 25 November 1986 at column 59.

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, to his question about single payments, on 20 November 1986 at column 334.

Nuclear Power

Dr. David Clark asked the Paymaster General what is the assessment level during normal operations for maximum annual radiation exposure of any person outside the site boundary applied by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate in considering the safety case for a new nuclear power reactor expressed in millisieverts per year; and when this assessment level was introduced.

Mr. Lee: The maximum annual radiation exposure of any person outside the site boundary as a result of the normal operation of a new nuclear reactor licensed by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate is 5msv, for the whole body.

This limit for the general public has been used since 1959 when the licensing of nuclear power reactors was introduced in the United Kingdom. The limit was first recommended by the International Commission for Radiological Protection in its document ICRP2 and again more recently in ICRP26.

Homeless People

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Paymaster General what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: the Contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the disabilities study unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I have considered the report and have asked the Manpower Services Commission to take account of the issues and implications which are raised in respect of homeless young people entering employment and training programmes.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Flannery asked the Paymaster General how many installations have been notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982.

Mr. Lee: One thousand, five hundred and thirteen.

Mr. Flannery asked the Paymaster General how many of the installations notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982 are not sites which come under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984.

Mr. Lee: One thousand two hundred and eighty four.

Mr. Flannery asked the Paymaster General how many installations which have been notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982 come under these regulations by virtue of the storage of the hazardous substance liquified petroleum gas.

Mr. Lee: Seven hundred and seven.

Handsworth (Ethnic Monitoring Exercise)

Mr. Rooker asked the Paymaster General if the information to unemployed claimants about the ethnic monitoring exercise at the Handsworth unemployment benefit office will be *(a)* in languages other than English and *(b)* given sufficiently in advance to claimants so as to allow them time to reflect before deciding whether to co-operate.

Mr. Lee: Posters have been on display in prominent positions in the offices since 18 December 1986 and are in the following languages:

English
Gujerati
Hindi
Urdu
Punjabi

Staff have been instructed not to count any claimant who does not seem to understand that he/she is being asked to give details of his/her ethnic origin.

Peckham (Task Force)

Ms. Harman asked the Paymaster General (1) how many new jobs have been created by the task force initiative in Peckham;

(2) how many of the new jobs created by the task force in Peckham have been filled by people resident in Peckham;

(3) how many more jobs he expects to be created as a direct result of the task force initiative in Peckham;

(4) how much of the money allocated to the task force initiative in Peckham has already been spent;

(5) what is the cost per job of each job created by the task force initiative in Peckham;

(6) what are the new jobs created by the task force initiative in Peckham.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme (Supervisors)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Paymaster General whether difficulties in the recruitment of supervisors to the

Manpower Services Commission community programme have arisen among qualified applicants in receipt of benefits as a result of the average weekly wage limit of £67; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The wages of management and supervisory posts in community programme projects are not included in the calculation of the £67 average. The Manpower Services Commission maximum reimbursement rates for supervisors are based on local authority, non-manual workers rates. The latest increase was effected from 1 July 1986.

Apprentices (Greater London)

Mr. Dobson asked the Paymaster General what was the total number of apprentices in Greater London in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Lee: The available information relates to manufacturing industries since 1981, as follows:

Year (March)	*Number of apprentices in manufacturing industries in Greater London (thousands)*
1981	11·3
1982	9·5
1983	6·9
1984	5·1
1985	4·6
1986	4·5

Note: Many of those receiving apprenticeship training under YTS (since 1983), specifically those without a contract of employment, are not counted as employees and are not included in the table. With the move away from traditional apprentice training in many industries some long duration schemes of a type which previously could have involved apprenticeships may not now be so classified.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what weight is given to the political opinions of officers seeking promotion within the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: Internal promotion boards for the Royal Ulster Constabulary are a matter for the chief constable. Promotion within the Royal Ulster Constabulary is based solely on merit. The political opinions of officers seeking promotion are not taken into consideration.

Rates (Non-payment)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many summonses he has issued since 1 April for non-payment of rates.

Mr. Viggers: During the period 1 April 1986 to 31 December 1986 the Department of Environment (NI) issued 45,100 processes for the non-payment of rates.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nights each of the Ministers in his Department spent in Northern Ireland during the months of July, August, September, October and November.

Mr. Tom King: The information is as follows:

	July 1986	*August 1986*	*September 1986*	*October 1986*	*November 1986*
Secretary of State	6	5	7	7	6
Mr. Nicholas Scott	10	10	8	4	7
Lord Lyell	3	2	6	10	7
Mr. Richard Needham	8	10	8	9	6
Dr. Brian Mawhinney	7	3	6	2	10
Mr. Peter Viggers[1]	—	—	4	10	7
Dr. Rhodes Boyson[1]	6	5	2	—	—

[1] Dr. Boyson left the Northern Ireland Office and Mr. Viggers joined in mid-September 1986.

Action for Community Employment

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list of current sponsors of Action for Community Employment schemes in Northern Ireland by name, contact address, number of Action for Community Employment places and tasks.

Mr. Viggers: Information in the form requested could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. There are currently some 700 sponsors providing over 6,000 jobs throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of the Action for Community Employment scheme are currently being made; and what plans there are for improving the effectiveness of the use of the Action for Community Employment scheme.

Mr. Viggers: All applications from potential ACE sponsors are carefully scrutinised to ensure that they satisfy the aims and objectives of the scheme and regular on site inspections of projects are carried out. Regular reviews of ACE are made to ensure its continued effectiveness and to assess its usefulness in improving prospects of ACE workers to find permanent jobs.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there are any plans for increasing the number of places available under the Action for Community Employment scheme.

Mr. Viggers: Yes. The number of jobs promoted through ACE will rise to an average of 6,200 throughout 1987-88.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the impact of the moratorium on

approvals of Action for Community Employment schemes imposed by the Northern Ireland committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in May.

Mr. Viggers: I take it the question relates to the Action for Community Employment scheme. The moratorium has had little impact—financial resources to undertake new projects had already been fully committed prior to the moratorium which does not affect existing projects.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans for lifting the requirement for potential and current sponsors for Action for Community Employment schemes to seek trade union approval for their activities.

Mr. Viggers: No.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is satisfied with the current arrangements for the recruitment, management and training of Action for Community Employment workers.

Mr. Viggers: Yes.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans for increasing the number of Action for Community Employment places available to undertake energy efficiency work, under the aegis of Neighbourhood Energy Action.

Mr. Viggers: I have no immediate plans to increase the number of Action for Community Employment (ACE) places involved in energy efficiency work.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recent withdrawal of Action for Community Employment funds from St. Matthews Tenants Association in the Short Strand area of Belfast; and if he will lay down a policy for such terminations of Action for Community Employment funding in mid-term.

Mr. Viggers: The policy in respect of terminaion of Government funding for community groups is outlined in the reply given to a question by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 27 June 1985.

Government financial assistance to the St. Matthew's Tenants Association is being withdrawn in accordance with this policy.

Short Brothers

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will place in the Library the text of the special study by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations of recruitment to Short Brothers in Belfast, commissioned by the Northern Ireland Fair Employment Agency; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what conclusion was reached in the study by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations on charges that Short Brothers practised unfair discrimination against Roman Catholics.

Mr. Viggers: A copy of the report by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations on recruitment, selection and appointments at Short Brothers plc from April to December 1984 was placed in the Library on 18 December.

I welcome the findings of this report and note that it concluded that there was no statistical evidence of discrimination or failure to afford equality of opportunity.

THE ARTS

Public and Private Bodies (Expenditure)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what monitoring is undertaken by his Department in respect of the total amount spent on the Arts by public and private bodies.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *629*]: My Department is responsible for its own expenditure and monitors expenditure under the arts programme by the non-departmental public bodies for which I am responsible. The monitoring of expenditure by other public bodies concerned with the arts is a matter for the responsible sponsor Departments, although I am of course interested in the information.

The amount of expenditure on the arts by private bodies is a matter for the organisation and individuals concerned. Some information on this is available from CIPFA and the Policy Studies Institute which undertake research and public statistics in this area.

Arts Council (Grant)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what has been the total amount spent by his Department both directly and indirectly on funding literature in each of the past six years.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *738*]: Details of Arts Council and regional arts associations' funding for literature during each of the past six years are as follows:

	1981-82 £	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85* £	*1985-86* £	*1986-87* £
Arts Council	674,644	747,835	837,168	786,942	488,376	493,350
Eastern Arts	44,005	49,821	51,809	81,547	94,503	98,950
East Midlands Arts	26,125	24,075	17,924	11,968	25,844	47,528
Greater London Arts	74,727	69,537	83,144	65,540	61,584	250,000
Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts	5,358	22,245	12,748	20,870	26,113	32,875
Merseyside Arts	17,145	18,734	18,102	28,686	29,996	48,250
Northern Arts	58,436	73,560	80,062	91,223	99,811	120,350
North-West Arts	33,193	38,974	59,027	46,874	69,504	81,555
Southern Arts	26,562	31,758	33,900	44,800	39,659	42,750
South-East Arts	25,863	30,431	38,631	34,700	20,995	24,000
South-West Arts	21,830	27,048	26,505	32,778	68,618	74,000

	1981-82 £	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £	1985-86 £	1986-87 £
West Midlands Arts	19,000	23,807	24,735	41,046	34,542	50,250
Yorkshire Arts	31,642	40,845	46,349	57,764	63,321	87,000
TOTAL	1,058,530	1,198,670	1,330,104	1,344,738	1,122,866	1,450,858

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts to what extent his Department is monitoring the effect on the arts of the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan councils.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *630*]: The Arts Council informs us of the position as and when requested.

Sponsorship

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what information he has as to the amount of arts sponsorship undertaken by business in the United Kingdom for each year since 1982-83; and on what information his statistics are based.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *630*]: Precise figures are not available. Cautious estimates of arts sponsorship are provided by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts. These figures are as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	13
1983-84	n/a
1984-85	15
1985-86	20
1986-87	25

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Statistics

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to obtain up-to-date statistics relating to crimes committed by persons remanded on bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Statistics of the type requested can only be obtained from a specially arranged research study, involving the collection of a considerable amount of extra data. We shall be considering, in the near future, whether the earlier study should be repeated, taking into account the additional data collection which would be required from police forces and the conflicting claims of other studies on limited resources.

Metropolitan Police (Pay)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average hourly rate of pay for a police constable in the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the average basic pay of a police constable in the Metropolitan police is £6·28 an hour. This includes London weighting and London allowance but not overtime payments or rent or other allowances.

News International Dispute

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of manhours of Metropolitan police officers deployed to date in connection with the News International dispute.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that up to 30 November 1986 the total number of manhours of officers deployed in connection with the News International dispute was 1,133,808.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total number of arrests in connection with the News International dispute at Wapping to the latest available date; and if he will break down that number by alleged offence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the commissioner that, up to 29 December, 1,370 people had been arrested in connection with the dispute. Of these 1,238 were charged. The principal offence charged in each was as follows:

	Number
Grievous bodily harm	4
Actual bodily harm	17
Assault on police	63
Criminal damage	65
Threatening/Insulting behaviour	507
Drunkenness	71
Highway obstruction	298
Obstructing police	177
Theft	26
Possession of offensive weapon	10
Total	1,238

Police (Cost)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the average total cost per police officer employed in each police force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Actual expenditure per police officer in each police force in England and Wales for the financial year 1984-85 is given in column 47 of "Police Statistics 1984-85 Actuals" published in November 1985 by CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 1 Buckingham Gate, London, SW1E 6HS). I understand that "Police Statistics 1985-86 Actuals", giving this kind of information for the financial year 1985-86, are expected to be published at the end of January 1987.

Police (Clear-up Rate)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of crimes cleared up per police officer employed in each police force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The ratios requested are given in the following table. The ratio of the number of offences

cleared up to total notifiable offences recorded differs markedly for different categories of offence; hence the number of offences cleared up is affected by variations between police forces in the numbers of each type of offence recorded and the circumstances of those offences. It is also affected by variations in police practices in recording offences cleared up. Many officers may be involved in clearing up a single offence and the ratio does not indicate how many offences, on average, are dealt with successfully by each officer. Variations in the number of offences cleared up per officer may also reflect variations in other duties carried out by the police in respect of public order, crime prevention, traffic, and so on and variations in the numbers of civilian staff supporting the police, and in the duties which those staff perform.

The ratio of the number of notifiable offences recorded as cleared up[1] to the total police strength[2] in each force in England and Wales, 1985

Police Force	
Avon and Somerset	9
Bedfordshire	13
Cambridgeshire	11
Cheshire	11
Cleveland	12
Cumbria	11
Derbyshire	13
Devon and Cornwall	11
Dorset	11
Durham	13
Essex	10
Gloucestershire	8
Greater Manchester	13
Hampshire	10
Hertfordshire	12
Humberside	14
Kent	9
Lancashire	11
Leicestershire	12
Lincolnshire	10
London, City of	1
Merseyside	11
Metropolitan Police District	5
Norfolk	11
Northamptonshire	13
Northumbria	21
North Yorkshire	8
Nottinghamshire	14
South Yorkshire	13
Staffordshire	12
Suffolk	10
Surrey	6
Sussex	8
Thames Valley	13
Warwickshire	8
West Mercia	11
West Midlands	10
West Yorkshire	13
Wiltshire	10
Dyfed-Powys	9
Gwent	15
North Wales	11
South Wales	13
England and Wales	10

[1]Notifiable offences recorded as cleared up in 1985; excluding offences of "other criminal damage" value £20 and under.

[2]Police strength on 31st December 1985; excluding special constables, traffic wardens and civilian staff.

Police Forces (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the total expenditure of each police force and the total staff employed, showing separately the number of civilians in each case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested, for police areas in England and Wales, is as follows. The expenditure figures in the second column are net of income but not of police grant, and are subject to audit.

Police area	*Provisional outturn 1985/86 (£ thousand)*	*Actual strength on 31 March 1986*				
		Police officers	*Civilians*		*Traffic wardens*	*Cadets*
			Full-time	*Part-time*		
Avon and Somerset	65,919	2,958	752	46	137	—
Bedfordshire	22,278	985	271	72	33	—
Cambridgeshire	27,051	1,136	330	74	45	—
Cheshire	37,755	1,806	364	124	44	—
Cleveland	31,029	1,470	275	76	25	—
Cumbria	25,769	1,127	275	77	25	11
Derbyshire	40,391	1,753	606	172	82	—
Devon and Cornwall	64,910	2,739	798	100	119	—
Dorset	29,766	1,199	400	41	66	8
Durham	28,150	1,293	464	124	18	—
Dyfed Powys	18,813	930	179	57	23	—
Essex	57,904	2,666	666	173	114	21
Gloucestershire	23,320	1,146	211	91	22	—
Greater Manchester	148,215	6,768	1,449	354	184	—
Gwent	20,619	978	201	59	20	6
Hampshire	68,241	3,062	694	153	91	—
Hertfordshire	34,572	1,565	342	123	82	—
Humberside	43,976	1,933	478	128	65	—
Kent	66,276	2,870	784	191	115	—
Lancashire	66,740	3,021	713	363	91	—
Leicestershire	37,801	1,737	407	91	96	—
Lincolnshire	25,594	1,139	306	124	21	—
Merseyside	103,448	4,543	1,098	155	147	—
Norfolk	27,628	1,263	281	60	39	—
Northamptonshire	23,450	1,025	286	47	33	—
Northumbria	78,164	3,357	968	150	145	—

Police area	Provisional outturn 1985/86 (£ thousand)	Actual strength on 31 March 1986				
		Police officers	Civilians		Traffic wardens	Cadets
			Full-time	Part-time		
North Wales	27,637	1,253	355	99	31	—
North Yorkshire	29,410	1,361	294	81	21	—
Nottinghamshire	47,427	2,210	546	130	75	—
South Wales	68,001	3,066	889	167	93	1
South Yorkshire	63,901	2,848	652	121	65	—
Staffordshire	44,521	2,087	631	71	39	42
Suffolk	26,836	1,121	369	78	36	—
Surrey	34,673	1,614	363	114	42	—
Sussex	57,617	2,790	674	178	121	—
Thames Valley	75,787	3,297	1,110	155	112	—
Warwickshire	21,927	929	281	40	24	6
West Mercia	44,428	1,939	696	128	50	—
West Midlands	141,015	6,520	1,367	294	181	1
West Yorkshire	106,412	5,145	1,141	268	159	33
Wiltshire	23,270	1,043	275	63	44	—
City of London	24,396	774	308	23	70	—
Metropolitan	748,660	26,813	12,735	899	1,716	270
Total	2,803,697	119,279	36,284	6,134	4,774	399

Criminal Injury (Compensation)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated total amount of compensation paid in the latest year for which figures are available to victims of criminal injury who were awarded less than £550.

Mr. Mellor: About £2·4 million in the financial year ending 31 March 1986.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of staff working for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) on 16 December 1986 at column *481*.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to prevent delays in the processing of applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) and for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 4 December 1986, at column *711*.

European Community (Weapons)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now received the draft of the Commission's directive designed to remove controls on weapons across community frontiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a consolidated version of the immigration rules incorporating those changes made since the last occasion when the full rules were published.

Mr. Waddington: A copy of the immigration rules incorporating changes made prior to last October is in the Libraries of both Houses. The changes made last October were confined to the appendix to the rules.

Myra Hindley

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester as to the cost of Myra Hindley's visit to Saddleworth moor, as to what information was gained from it, as to why information was given to the media prior to this taking place, as to the security provided, as to the number of police engaged and their forces, and as to what assessment he made of the threat to security presented by the presence on the moor of a man armed with a knife.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a preliminary report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester about the visit of Myra Hindley to Saddleworth moor on 16 December. At this stage, accurate costing for the operation is not available, but 135 officers from Greater Manchester police, Lancashire constabulary, West Yorkshire police, Kent constabulary, and the Metropolitan police were involved and a total of 1,590 hours of overtime were worked. The information provided by Miss Hindley during the visit indicated two sites where further investigation might prove valuable, one of which was not previously known to the police. The media were informed in advance only of Miss Hindley's offer to assist the police and not of authorisation for or timing of the visit. I understand that the presence on the moor of a man armed with a knife was not considered to be a serious threat and that he was at no time closer than two miles from Miss Hindley.

Police (Misconduct)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many police officers have given evidence *(a)* in private and *(b)* in public against the misconduct of fellow police officers in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have no statistics of this kind.

Stocken Prison

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates construction work at Her Majesty's prison Stocken on each of the four phases of prison officers' houses began; and what consideration was given by his Department to abandoning or curtailing the project, in view of the possible level of occupation.

Mr. Mellor: Construction work on the prison officers' houses at Stocken prison commenced on 17 September 1984. During the construction period a phased handover was agreed in order to provide early completion for some of the houses. The original planned level of provision of quarters at Stocken was to have been some 160 houses; in 1981 this was reduced to 40 houses, following agreement that staff were no longer required to occupy official quarters. This was seen as the prudent minimum at the time, and was again confirmed as the best estimate of requirements during a review in 1983, a year before the contract was let.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date or dates his Department became under legal contract to start each of the phases of construction work for prison officers' houses at Her Majesty's prison Stocken.

Mr. Mellor: The contract for the construction of the prison officers' houses at Stocken prison was the responsibility of the Property Services Agency, but I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that a single contract for the construction of all the houses was let on 8 August 1984.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the specific cost of *(a)* the six British Broadcasting Corporation micro-computers and *(b)* the two additional ones purchased for Her Majesty's prison Stocken; and why the 12 additional computers subsequently purchased were of a different type.

Mr. Mellor: The cost of the first six BBC B micro-computers was £399 each and that of the two BBC Master-series micro-computers purchased subsequently was £499 each. Both figures exclude the cost of peripheral equipment.

BBC micro-computers, which have widespread educational application, were obtained for use in a number of areas of the education programme as a learning aid and to allow students to develop basic computing skills. Ferranti micro-computers were provided for the separate vocational training course in computer studies to enable students to learn commercial computing skills using the type of equipment employed in a modern office environment. Emphasis is placed on the commercial application of skills and students are encouraged to aim for an appropriate qualification.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will identify the specific date or dates on which *(a)* the inmates' chairs, *(b)* the tutor's chair, *(c)* the tutor's desk, *(d)* the computer stands, *(e)* the filing cabinet or cabinets and *(f)* the carpet intended for the computer room at Her Majesty's prison Stocken were delivered to the prison; and whether the room is now operational;

(2) what was the purchase price of *(a)* the 13 inmates' chairs, *(b)* the tutor's chair, *(c)* the tutor's desk, *(d)* the computer stands, *(e)* the filing cabinet or cabinets and *(f)* the carpet intended for the computer room at Her Majesty's prison Stocken; and what instructions he has issued since regarding the need for competitive tendering and economic choice of supplies.

Mr. Mellor: The information about the price and delivery dates of the items ordered from the commercial supplier is as follows:

	Contract price (£) (excluding VAT)	*Date delivered to establishment*
13 students' chairs	1,040	31 July 1986
13 work stations	5,083	Delivered in part lots completed by end November 1986
1 carpet	745	17 June 1986
1 tutor's chair	133	[1]31 July 1986
1 tutor's desk	327	—
1 filing cabinet	245	—
1 cupboard	280	—

[1] Subsequently returned to the supplier.

The orders for the tutor's chair, desk, filing cabinet and cupboard were subsequently cancelled, at no cost to public funds, and these items replaced with cheaper alternatives from the Crown Suppliers. It has been made clear to the staff concerned that they must always seek best value for money in such purchases and, save in exceptional circumstances, follow departmental purchasing procedures including competitive tendering in all appropriate cases.

Commissioning work in the computer studies room is almost complete and the vocational training course is expected to begin within the next two weeks.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers who applied for posting to Her Majesty's prison Stocken prior to its initial opening indicated to his postings section that they would not transfer unless provided with a quarter, in accordance with paragraph 5 of notice to staff 57/84; how many indicated they would prefer a quarter but did not insist upon it; and how many indicated they expected to make their own arrangements for housing.

Mr. Mellor: Twenty-one staff who applied for transfer to Her Majesty's prison Stocken stated that they would require a quarter. A further 273 applied for transfer irrespective of the availability of quarters. Applicants were not required to state whether they would prefer to occupy a quarter or make their own arrangements for housing.

Reckless Driving

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the numbers of persons *(a)* imprisoned for being found guilty of reckless driving causing death or *(b)* disqualified from driving for life, for that offence, giving figures, for each year in the last 10 years.

Mr. Mellor: The information available on sentences for offences of causing death by reckless driving and on disqualifications imposed for offences of causing death or bodily harm is published annually in "Statistics of Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (tables 7 and 14 of the issue for 1985).

NATO Civil Defence Committee

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column 631, concerning the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's civil defence committee, if he will state why it is inappropriate to place records of the committee's meetings in the Library.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The documents carry a NATO security classification.

Guardians Ad Litem

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many guardians ad litem have been appointed *(a)* in the Huddersfield magistrates' court area and *(b)* in the Kirklees metropolitan county area.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not held centrally.

Walter Yao

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will reconsider his decision to deport Walter Yao pending a full review of his case; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the representations he has received concerning the proposed deportation of Walter Yao;

(3) if, in the light of further information now available, he will agree to meet the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside and Mr. Walter Yao to discuss the proposed deportation of the latter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I will write to the hon. Member once further representations about the case of Mr. Walter Yao have been considered. In the meantime, Mr. Yao will not be removed from the United Kingdom.

Offensive Weapons (Lambeth)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to representations made to him by the community/police consultative group for Lambeth in relation to the law on offensive weapons and particularly knives and other sharp instruments.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Possession of an offensive weapon in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse is an offence under the Prevention of Crime Act 1953. An offensive weapon is defined by the Act as any article made or adapted for causing injury, or intended for such use. It is difficult to see how this definition could be extended without making it illegal to carry innocently a whole range of items which have legitimate uses but which in the wrong hands may be dangerous. Nevertheless, we are continuing to keep the law on offensive weapons under close review and shall remain mindful of the representations which have been made on the subject by the community police consultation group for Lambeth.

Law and Order (Lambeth)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on law and order in the light of the report of the community police consultative group for Lambeth on the Brixton disorders of 1985, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I recently met members of Lambeth community police consultative group to discuss their report on the Brixton riot. Our aim remains to encourage the police to establish and maintain the good working relationship with the community which is an essential basis for preventing crime and disorder; to ensure that the police have the manpower and the equipment necessary to tackle disorder effectively if and when it occurs; and to ensure that the law gives the police sufficient powers to prevent and deal with disorder while preserving our traditional right of peaceful protest and assembly.

Crime Prevention (Lambeth)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on crime prevention in the light of the first report of the community police consultative group for Lambeth on the entry and search of premises and seizure of property and recommendations, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The report of the community police consultative group for Lambeth on the entry and search of premises and the seizure of property was concerned with the exercise of police powers. The group recognised that it carried out its review before the Police and Criminal Evidence Act code of practice for the searching of premises by police officers came into effect on 1 January 1986, and that this was likely to bring about significant changes. We believe this code has resolved many of the difficulties identified by the consultative group, but we have agreed that, when the code is reviewed in due course, full account will be taken of the group's recommendations.

Fire Cover (Greater London)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services' annual assessments of fire cover in Greater London for each year since 1972; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Assessment of standards of fire cover is a matter for the fire authority: in London, the Greater London council until 1 April 1986, and now the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority. It is not the practice to publish Her Majesty's inspectors of fire services' annual brigade inspection reports; but they give no ground for supposing that the fire authority has not made adequate arrangements to discharge its statutory obligations.

Police Service

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how far the employment provisions

of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 have been implemented in respect of the recruitment, training, promotion, assignment of duties and other employment opportunities of women in the police service in England and Wales;

(2) how far an individual's sex is treated as a genuine occupational qualification for the purpose of employment in the police service.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Sex Discrimination Act applies to the police service with certain specified exceptions, including different minimum heights for male and female police officers. There are special provisions for maternity leave and women pay lower contributions because the police pension scheme makes no provision for the widowers of women police officers, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Otherwise, conditions of service for men and women are the same. An individual's sex is not treated as a genuine occupational qualification for the purpose of employment in the police service. Male and female police officers must compete on equal terms for promotion to higher ranks. It is the responsibility of chief officers to decide how best to allocate their officers to police duties. Ability, not sex, should be the criterion for the allocation.

Female Police Officers (Firearms)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether female police officers are given the same opportunities as male police officers for training in the use of firearms in the course of their employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Yes, in England and Wales.

Deceased Persons (Police Custody)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have died each year since 1970 *(a)* in police custody and *(b)* in prison, and if he will give for each year a breakdown of the causes of death.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of persons who died in police custody (or otherwise with the police) during the years 1980 to 1985, together with the cause of death, number of inquests, and inquest verdicts are contained in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary—HC 409 (1980), and HC 463 (1981), HC 15 (1982), HC 528 (1983), HC 369 (1984), and HC 437 (1985)—and, for those within the Metropolitan police district, in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Cmnd. 8254, 8569, 8928, 9268, 9541, 9790). Information for 1986 is not yet available but will be included in the 1986 reports of the Chief Inspector and the Commissioner. Information for the years prior to 1980 was not collected centrally.

The details required in respect of deaths in prison custody in England and Wales are as follows:

Year	*Total Number of deaths*	*Suicide*	*Coroner's verdict*	
			Natural	*Non-natural*
1970	42 (19)	6	31	5
1971	69 (28)	13	46	10
1972	53 (16)	13	36	4
1973	61 (34)	14	43	4
1974	48 (14)	6	34	8
1975	59 (19)	14	38	7
1976	67 (22)	20	39	8
1977	41 (13)	11	25	5
1978	60 (23)	16	34	10
1979	73 (21)	21	43	9
1980	65 (16)	21	33	11
1981	58 (20)	16	35	7
1982	61 (13)	18	28	13
1983	64 (18)	21	33	10
1984	65 (17)	23	31	11
1985	39 (14)	23	23	13
1986[1]	56 (19)	4	12	6

[1] Coroners' verdicts have so far been received for only 22 cases in 1986.

N.B. The figures in parentheses indicate the number of the total who died in an NHS hospital.

Homeless People

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The Contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the disabilities study unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have seen a copy of this report and noted that most of its recommendations which are addressed to the Government are the concern of other Departments. Nevertheless, so far as we have opportunity, we shall continue to encourage voluntary organisations generally to work in partnership with the statutory sector, to be responsive to what may be the special needs of ethnic minorities, to develop effective equal opportunity policies and to improve the co-ordination of the services which they provide.

Indian Subcontinent (Visitors)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visitors from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were refused leave to enter and not given temporary admission in October 1985, November 1985, December 1985 and January 1986, respectively.

Mr. Waddington: The statistics available on persons refused leave to enter do not separately identify those granted temporary admission.

Visa Regulations

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received opposing the new visa regulations.

Mr. Waddington: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave to a question by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 20 November 1986, at column *687*.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the expenditure effects to date for his Department of the introduction of the new visa regulations.

Mr. Waddington: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Bryn Estyn (Open Prison)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultations he proposes to undertake in the Wrexham area before the construction of an open prison at Bryn Estyn, Wrexham;

(2) what is his policy towards the building of a new prison at Bryn Estyn, Wrexham; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will place a copy in the Library of any plans he has to build a new prison at Bryn Estyn, Wrexham.

Mr. Mellor: Informal consultations are taking place with Clwyd county council and Wrexham Maelor borough council under the provisions of Department of the Environment circular 18/84, which governs development proposals by Government Departments, about a possible prison development on the site of the former Bryn Estyn community home near Wrexham. A site feasibility study is also being undertaken by the Property Services Agency. If it is ultimately decided to proceed with the project, a formal notice of proposed development under circular 18/84 will be lodged with the planning authority, with whom responsibility for local consultation would then rest. Our present thinking is that the site should be developed to provide a closed category C prison for about 600 inmates; we have no plans to build an open prison.

Public Disorder

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from chief constables concerning the public disorder incidents in various towns and cities in which a number of police were injured on new year's eve; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In consultation with chief officers of police, we are considering whether there are any lessons which can be learned from these incidents.

Car Telephones (Prosecutions)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted for using hand-held car telephones whilst driving their vehicles on the highway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The available information relates to proceedings at magistrates' courts for careles driving and other offences and is published annually in "Offences relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table 5 of the issue for 1985). Information is not collected centrally about the circumstances of these alleged offences.

Drunken Driving

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from each chief constable detailing the number of motorists stopped and positively breathalysed for drunken driving in each force area between Christmas and new year's day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The official Home Office statistics on breath tests in England and Wales in 1986, including the Christmas period, will not be available until the middle of this year, but the Association of Chief Police Officers has collated provisional figures for the number of roadside screening tests which were positive in 42 police force areas, and this information is given in the table. Information is not yet available on the total number of tests carried out, but this will be included in the Home Office statistics.

Positive roadside screening tests carried out from 19 December 1986 to 1 January 1987

Police force area	*Number of positive results*
Avon and Somerset	114
Bedfordshire	56
Cambridgeshire	67
Cheshire	105
City of London	8
Cleveland	41
Cumbria	68
Derbyshire	62
Devon and Cornwall	120
Dorset	76
Durham	72
Dyfed-Powys	55
Essex	97
Gloucestershire	45
Greater Manchester	377
Gwent	56
Hampshire	144
Hertfordshire	61
Humberside	91
Kent	103
Lancashire	197
Leicestershire	194
Lincolnshire	57
Merseyside	123
Metropolitan Police	Not available
Norfolk	38
Northamptonshire[1]	70
Northumbria	109
North Wales	112
North Yorkshire	53
Nottinghamshire	149
South Wales	121
South Yorkshire	168
Staffordshire	63
Suffolk	42
Surrey	77
Sussex	109
Thames Valley	186
Warwickshire	41
West Mercia	87
West Midlands	211
West Yorkshire	200
Wiltshire	32
Total	4,280

[1] Figures quoted cover period 19 December 1986 to 3 January 1987.

Drinking and Driving Campaign

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will recommend to the Association of Chief Police Officers that the campaign against drinking and driving should continue throughout the year, not just at Christmas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Drinking and driving is not just a problem at Christmas, and the Association of Chief Police Officers has made it clear that the police service enforces the law throughout the year.

Welsh Police (Bilingual Penalty Tickets)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the Welsh police forces have produced bilingual Welsh/English fixed penalty tickets for motoring offences under the new regulations for on-the-spot fines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Dog Faeces

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in introducing byelaws relating to dog faeces.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I would refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 17 December 1986 at columns *554-58*.

Police (Widows' Pension Increase)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the reasons for his decision to veto the agreement for a weekly pension increase of £1.41p to elderly police widows; and what saving he expects to make.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: With regret, my right hon. Friend felt unable to implement the agreement reached by the Police Negotiating Board to increase the flat-rate pensions payable to police widows whose husbands retired before 1 April 1956. To do so would have been to breach the longstanding principle that pension entitlement under public service schemes should not be improved retrospectively. Such a breach could not be justified for this group of police widows in isolation from claims on behalf of other groups of public service widows.

The initial cost of awarding the increase recommended by the Police Negotiating Board is estimated at £455,000 per annum, but the cost of meeting the expected claims on other public service schemes would in total be unacceptably high.

Metropolitan Police (Guns)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions guns were issued to Metropolitan police officers in each district in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The figures are as follows:

Issue of firearms in each district of the Metropolitan Police in operations against persons known or believed to be armed, 1978 to 1985

	Occasions					*Operations*[1]		
District	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
A	51	45	52	135	128	14	8	13
B	204	143	163	106	235	99	31	29
C	115	138	117	82	50	22	39	22
D	180	191	107	127	190	46	40	19
E	163	157	177	234	256	50	34	28
F	176	184	651	153	94	39	22	27
G	219	183	213	174	220	112	46	44
H	180	174	139	188	205	53	22	31
J	395	480	502	151	164	81	52	61
K	411	295	337	342	336	87	65	40
L	278	176	237	200	255	72	55	41
M	323	355	163	157	192	117	42	66
N	245	219	170	177	223	97	39	32
P	223	404	90	197	202	118	59	114
Q	114	163	175	119	154	37	39	43
R	391	255	241	156	127	45	15	44
S	216	463	104	250	393	64	61	14
T	151	451	85	63	115	27	31	47
V	44	466	12	72	42	25	30	30
W	119	83	125	77	160	60	31	55
X	225	266	265	233	307	45	57	54
Y	160	273	166	238	309	48	57	27
Z	121	152	108	135	133	52	35	41
Airport	20	21	52	17	64	15	22	[2]—
Total	4,724	5,737	4,451	3,783	4,574	1,425	972	922

[1] The basis on which the figures are recorded was changed in 1983. From 1983 the figures record the number of operations in which firearms were issued; the figure for 1982 and earlier years record the number of occasions on which firearms were issued.
[2] Until 1985 airport district included West Drayton, Staines and Sunbury, but in that year parts of the district were allocated to T and X districts.
Figures for 1986 are not yet available.

Metropolitan Police (Crime Statistics)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes in total, and how many crimes of violence, were committed in each district of the Metropolitan police in 1978 and in each year since;

(2) how many burglaries were committed in each district of the Metropolitan police in 1978 and in each year since;

(3) how many murders were committed in each district of the Metropolitan police in 1978 and in each year since;

(4) how many murders were cleared up by the Metropolitan police in 1978 and each year since; and what percentage this represents of total murders in its area.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were charged with *(a)* possession of heroin and *(b)* dealing in heroin in 1978, and in each year since, in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Mellor: The table gives the available information, which relates to the number of persons proceeded against for these offences.

Persons[1] proceeded against in the Metropolitan police district for (a) possession of and (b) trafficking in heroin Metropolitan police district

Number of persons

Offence	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Possession	166	241	339	320	324	470	805	924
Trafficking[2]	42	52	95	102	119	130	223	444

[1] As a person may have been proceeded against at the same time for both types of offence the figures cannot be added together to produce totals.

[2] Unlawful production, unlawful supply, possession with intent to supply unlawfully and unlawful import or export.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were cautioned formally for sexual offences *(a)* in each Metropolitan police district and *(b)* in the Metropolitan police area in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Metropolitan Police (Caution Procedures)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what procedures are followed in formal cautioning by the Metropolitan police;

(2) whether formal cautioning by the Metropolitan police involves an acknowledgement of guilt;

(3) how formal cautions by the Metropolitan police are recorded; and how long they remain on record in each form and place of record.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The criteria for the cautioning of offenders are set out in Home Office circular 14/1985, which provides that a person may be cautioned by the police only in cases where he admits the offence in question. the circular advises that this should normally be done in person by a police officer of the rank of inspector or above at a police station. Records of cautions should be kept locally and, in the case of offenders who have no other record, the the length of time for which these records are kept should be limited to three years or, in the case of a juvenile, until he has reached the age of 17, whichever is the later date. I understand from the Commissioner that the Metropolitan police follows this guidance.

Mr. Babu Lal Gupta

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Mr. Babu Lal Gupta, then a diplomat at the Indian High Commission, claimed diplomatic immunity in the course of police inquiries into drug trafficking; whether the Indian High Commission permitted him to be interviewed; when official inquiries into allegations of drug trafficking were completed; and when Mr. Gupta left the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: As the inquiries were undertaken by HMCE and not the police, I have been asked to reply.

I have today answered a related question from my hon. Friend and I would refer him to that answer.

Immigration

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the figures of those admitted to the United Kingdom for settlement over the past 12 months and state their country of origin.

Mr. Waddington [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *734*]: The number of persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the 12 months ending 30 September 1986 (including both those granted settlement on their arrival and those granted settlement on removal of the time limit on their stay) was published by broad nationality grouping in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics third quarter 1986" (issue 38/86).

Immigrants

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department collects on the number of immigrants who have entered the United Kingdom with the stated intention of working, but who have not worked for a five-year period.

Mr. Waddington [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *735*]: People who seek to enter the United Kingdom for the purpose of working here are admitted only if they qualify under the immigration rules. Detailed records are not kept of the subsequent circumstances of those who so qualify. However, those who are granted limited leave to enter for employment are required to show that they are still so employed before any extension of that leave is granted.

Tamils

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of Sri Lankan Tamils, *(a)* men and *(b)* women, who were held in detention on 10 December 1986.

Mr. Waddington [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *735*]: On the night of 10/11 December 43 male and two female citizens of Sri Lanka were in detention under powers contained in the Immigration Act 1971 having arrived as passengers. No separate record is kept of the ethnic origin of detained Sri Lankans.

ENERGY

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the volume of *(a)* low level, *(b)* intermediate level and *(c)* high level nuclear waste that has arisen at Sellafield from the combined reprocessing of the total throughput of spent Magnox nuclear fuel derived from the Latina Magnox reactor in Italy and the Tokai Magnox reactor in Japan.

Mr. Goodlad: The quantities of low level and intermediate level radioactive waste attributable to the reprocessing of spent fuel from these reactors were given in my reply of 27 November to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, (Mr. Beith), at column 302 and of 15 December to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), at column 383, respectively. I am informed by British Nuclear Fuels that the total volume of high level waste is 90 cubic metres.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will set out the contractual obligations upon British Nuclear Fuels plc regarding the storage of nuclear waste arising from the management and reprocessing of imported spent Magnox fuel.

Mr. Goodlad: BNFL's contracts entered into prior to 1976 contain no express provisions regarding the storage of waste arising from the management and reprocessing of spent Magnox fuel. Since 1976 BNFL's contracts have contained options for the return of such waste. BNFL is obliged to provide interim storage of such waste prior to its return to the customer.

The Government's policy on the disposal of waste arising under BNFL's reprocessing contracts with overseas customers was set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 2 May at column 502.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy what resources have been used in his Department on the post-Chernobyl reviews of emergency procedures; what studies have been made or commissioned in revising the off-site emergency plans of nuclear installations; what discussions have taken place with the Central Electricity Generating Board on reviewing the reference accidents for off-site emergency plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 18 December at columns 612 and 613, in reply to a question by hon. Friend the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). The Department of Energy is participating fully in the review of emergency plans and is in touch with the CEGB and others as appropriate.

Sellafield

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will instruct British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to allow access to Sellafield nuclear plant of Euratom inspectors in assessing the appropriate safeguarding of designated civil nuclear material on the same terms as applied to the nuclear installations inspectorate in conducting their recent safety audit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Euratom safeguards inspectors already have the necessary right of access to all the civil nuclear material at Sellafield.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *620*, on public visits to Sellafield, if he will now withdraw his invitation to the public to visit Sellafield made during his visit on 7 May 1986 in consideration that such arrangements are matters for which British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. is responsible.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has completed his consideration of the requisition for mains electricity supply to Bolventor and Temple on Bodmin moor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department is making every effort to resolve the complex issues involved in the South Western Electricity board's appeals against the requisitions from Bolventor and Temple. My right hon. Friend will announce his decisions on the appeals as soon as he possibly can.

British Coal Enterprise Ltd.

Sir Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many new jobs have been created by the British Coal Enterprise scheme at the latest convenient date; and if he will give details for each area of Great Britain.

Mr. David Hunt: At the end of December 1986 British Coal Enterprise Ltd. had assisted in the creation of 13,077 new job opportunities. The regional breakdown is as follows:

	Number
Scotland	2,518
North East	1,875
Yorkshire	2,289
North Midlands	358
South Midlands	656
Western	1,652
South Wales	3,561
South East	168

The company has so far committed £20·8 million and has generated a total of £137 million of job creation investment.

Details of the company's activities are contained in the annual review and in the report and accounts, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Coal Industry

Sir Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will bring up to date the figures for colliery output and productivity of British Coal by area which were given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Havant on 18 October, *Official Report*, columns *75-76*.

Mr. David Hunt: I am advised by British Coal that the total deep mine revenue output and average revenue output per man shift for each area for the fiscal month of November 1986 were as follows:

Four weeks ended 22 November 1986

Area	*Revenue output (thousand tonnes)*	*Output per man shift (tonnes)*
Scotland	252	2·51
North East	867	3·06
North Yorkshire	1,434	4·64
South Yorkshire	1,011	3·46
North Derbyshire	587	4·09
Nottinghamshire	1,576	3·52
South Midlands	520	3·64
Kent	47	2·55
Western	906	3·65
South Wales	602	2·76

Theatre Groups

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library the material used by theatre groups financed by his Department and concerning energy, after vetting by his Department.

Mr. Peter Walker: I will place a representative sample of theatre group scripts in the Library of the House, together with project material which they distribute. If the hon. Member wishes to see a school performance, I will ask my Energy Efficiency Office to make the arrangements.

Berkeley and Oldbury Power Stations

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Energy if there are any plans to develop and test emergency evacuation plans for Cheltenham in the event of a serious accident at Berkeley or Oldbury power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 12 December 1986, at columns 195-6.

Dounreay Power Station

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Energy what incidents at United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Dounreay, were notified to Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate *(a)* between February 1977 and July 1982 and *(b)* since August 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Details of incidents at Dounreay notified to Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate under the arrangements reported to Parliament on 2 February 1977 and revised by the statement to Parliament on 26 July 1982 are given in the Health and Safety Executive's quarterly statements on nuclear incidents, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. The relevant references in those statements are as follows:

Year	*Reference*
1977	77/5
	77/6
	77/2/7
	77/3/7
	77/3/15
1978	78/1/10
	78/2/21
	78/4/16
1979	79/2/11
	79/4/5
1980	80/3/4
	80/3/10
	80/3/12
	80/4/3
1981	81/1/2
	81/1/5
	81/3/5
	81/3/6
	81/3/7
	81/4/5
1982	82/1/1
	82/1/2
	82/2/3
	82/2/4
1983	Nil
1984	Nil
1985	Nil
1986	Nil

The first two incidents in 1977 happened in the first quarter. The numbers 5 and 6 refer to incident number, not date.

Magnox Fuel

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish weekly input-output tables of spent Magnox nuclear fuel reprocessed at Sellafield over the last two years.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

Civil Nuclear Power

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the categories of information held by his Department on civil nuclear power which are deemed necessary to be kept secret on grounds of national interest;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) *Official Report*, 19 November 1986, column *233*, if he will set out the nature of the sensitivity of information to which he refers; and what are the aspects of the national interest that any revelations of information on the civil nuclear programme are likely to damage.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Uranium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether there has been any change in policy since 1985 with regard to the disclosure of information on the import of uranium by the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Mr. Goodlad: No. It is my policy to be as open as possible, subject to considerations of commercial confidentiality.

SCOTLAND

"Paying for Local Government"

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a summary of responses to the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" equivalent to the Department of the Environment publication "Paying for Local Government, a Summary of Responses to the Green Paper."

Mr. Rifkind: In accordance with normal Scottish Office practice, copies of formal responses to the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd 9714) submitted to the Scottish Office have been made available for public inspection in the Library of St. Andrew's House, Edinburgh.

The pattern of responses on the proposed replacement of domestic rates by the community charge, and on non-domestic rating reform issues, was broadly similar to that shown in the summary published by the Department of the Environment.

European College of Education

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what further consideration he has given to the establishment of a European college of education at the site of the Dundee college of education.

Mr. John MacKay: I am aware of no developments since my reply to the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on 7 November 1986 at column *71*.

Teaching Staff (Interviews)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether a teacher or lecturer may make and keep a recording of an interview by, or meeting with, an inspector for the sake of staff development and safeguarding personal professional reputation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: It requires the agreement of all the parties taking part in an interview or meeting for a recording to be taken. In the case of an interview between a teacher or lecturer and one of Her Majesty's inspectors it would depend on the circumstances whether or not the inspector would agree to a recording being taken.

Physical Education

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the intake of first-year students at the Scottish school of physical education at Jordanhill college and at Dunfermline college of physical education, respectively, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Rifkind: The numbers of United Kingdom-based first-year students in physical education entering the colleges in each of the years 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87 were Dunfermline 40, 40, 40 and Jordanhill 20, 22, 20 respectively.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when a final decision will be taken on the proposed closure of the Scottish school of physical education at Jordanhill college.

Mr. Rifkind: In the light of my decision to centralise physical education teacher training, there will be no further intake of physical education students to Jordanhill college of education. The working party set up to consider the implementation of the rationalisation of training in this field has recommended that no pre-service physical education students should be trained at Jordanhill after June 1989.

I await the views of the governing bodies concerned on the report as a whole.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional facilities, including covered sports halls and playing fields, will be required if the centralisation of physical education training at Dunfermline college goes ahead as planned; and what will be the costs of such developments.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer to my hon. Friend's reply of 7 November to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill at column *633*. The working party set up to consider the implementation of the centralisation of the training of physical education teachers and the merger of Dunfermline college of physical education with Moray House College of Education identified a number of priorities for enhancing existing facilities at the merged college. Although precise costings were not available, it recommended inter alia the sale of playing fields owned by Moray house and a financial appraisal of the consequent provision of a floodlit synthetic pitch at the Dunfermline campus. The working party noted that increasingly national and regional sporting centres expect to have such a facility, which Jordanhill also lacks. It is not possible at this stage to give an estimate of the net expenditure, if any, which this project would entail. The working party also supported a longstanding proposal to upgrade and extend the games hall facilities at Dunfermline.

I await the views of the governing bodies concerned on the report as a whole.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate his Department has made of the likely entry to the first year in colleges of education of students studying physical education in each of the next three years; and what proportion of these will be *(a)* male and *(b)* female.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department's statistical model has predicted that the required intake to teacher training courses in physical education in each of the years 1987, 1988 and 1989 will be 88, 94 and 103 respectively. The Department has recently consulted education authorities and others about the extent to which the 1987 estimate needs to be adjusted in the light of wider supply issues, including authorities' own estimates of their likely needs. I expect to decide soon on the 1987 intake in the light of these consultations.

To maintain the existing sex distribution of PE teachers in schools, about one-third would be male, but the actual proportion of male and female students in the intake will depend on decisions made by the college in the light of the applications for places.

Gas Flaring (Air Pollution)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what reports he has received from Her Majesty's industrial air pollution inspectorate on the land-based flaring systems operated by BP Petroleum Development

Ltd., Sullom Voe, Shetland and Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd., Flotta, Orkney; and if he will place such reports in the Library.

Mr. Ancram: Annual reports on industrial air pollution, published by the Health and Safety Executive, are already available in the Library. They include comments on the operation of the flaring systems at Sullom Voe and Flotta.

Livestock Units (Erection)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning his proposal to control the erection of livestock units near residential properties; and what reply he has sent.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no representations following his announcement on 13 November 1986 of his proposals to extend planning controls to certain new livestock buildings.

Homelessness

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The Contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the disabilities study unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend has only very recently received a copy of this report, which contains a wide range of recommendations. These are at present being considered. I will ensure that the right hon. Member receives a copy of the reply which will in due course be sent to Mr. Guthrie.

SCOTLAND

A9 (Improvements)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received any objections to the draft compulsory purchase order for the Dunbeath bridge scheme on the A9; and if he will give his latest estimate of the date for work on the project to begin.

Mr. Ancram: No objections to the draft compulsory purchase order have been received. Construction is expected to start in the summer.

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current proposed starting date for the improvement of the A9 at Navidale Brae, north of Helmsdale in Sutherland.

Mr. Ancram: Investigations to determine a suitable route giving an adequate economic return are still in progress. A starting date is subject to identification of such a route, and thereafter to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds.

A7 (Redevelopment)

Mr. Archie Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any further statutory procedures remain outstanding before the Scottish Development Department will be in a position to advertise for contractors to undertake the work involved in the redevelopment of the A7 trunk route through the Sandbed area of Hawick; what is the earliest date that the Scottish Development Department could put the Sandbed contract out to tender; how soon after a contractor had been engaged the site works can commence; how long the site demolition work will take to complete; what arrangements are to be made with interested parties for the detailed provision of appropriate landscaping and street furniture in the Sandbed area; and what schemes are available to proprietors of properties in the Sandbed area to encourage them to upgrade their properties in conjunction with the Scottish Development Department scheme.

Mr. Ancram: The statutory procedures for the A7 Sandbed junction improvement scheme have been completed. Because of the small scale of the project, there will be no advertisment for interested contractors. Instead a short list of contractors will be invited by Borders regional council, as agents for the Secretary of State, to tender in March. It is planned to commence work in May, with the work spread over four months. Demolition work is expected to take approximately one week. A landscaping scheme is being prepared, and the views of interested parties will be sought and considered. Grants are available for the repair and maintenance of buildings which are of outstanding architectural or historical interest, and towards the costs incurred in the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of outstanding conservation areas.

Cancer Statistics

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women died of *(a)* cervical cancer and *(b)* breast cancer in each health board area in 1978 and in each year since, giving separately the number of women who died who were over 50 years of age.

Mr. John MacKay: The exact information requested in not readily available. The following table shows the numbers of deaths for women of all ages and for those aged 45 and over.

Deaths of Women from (a) Cervical Cancer (ICD[1] 180) and (b) Breast Cancer (ICD[1] 174) by Health Board Area, 1978 to 1981

Health Board Area	1978		1979		1980		1981	
	All ages	45 and over	All ages	45 and over	All ages	45 and over	All ages	45 and over
(a) Cervical cancer								
Scotland	203	175	224	199	187	160	201	172
Borders	6	5	5	5	1	1	2	1
Forth Valley	10	8	7	7	13	11	8	7
Dumfries and Galloway	3	3	12	10	10	10	2	2
Fife	19	13	20	18	17	15	15	13
Grampian	15	14	17	17	16	14	19	18
Highland	6	5	4	4	5	5	8	7
Lothian	29	26	38	35	17	14	37	32
Argyle and Clyde	11	9	18	14	17	13	15	14
Ayrshire and Arran	12	11	22	18	15	10	13	10
Greater Glasgow	50	44	43	36	44	38	45	38
Lanarkshire	23	19	19	17	14	13	17	12
Tayside	17	16	14	13	15	13	16	14
Orkney	1	1	3	3	2	2	3	3
Shetland	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1
Western Isles	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
(b) Breast cancer								
Scotland	1,191	1,090	1,176	1,086	1,214	1,096	1,175	1,099
Borders	25	25	27	24	18	17	28	26
Forth Valley	54	46	54	52	66	60	56	52
Dumfries and Galloway	33	28	41	35	41	34	47	44
Fife	73	69	61	48	76	68	68	65
Grampian	92	87	96	94	91	81	90	86
Highland	37	36	38	36	43	41	62	55
Lothian	177	165	171	158	185	170	152	146
Argyle and Clyde	117	107	120	107	109	98	110	104

Health Board Area	1978 All ages	1978 45 and over	1979 All ages	1979 45 and over	1980 All ages	1980 45 and over	1981 All ages	1981 45 and over
Ayrshire and Arran	92	83	74	66	84	78	85	80
Greater Glasgow	288	266	265	254	259	233	260	241
Lanarkshire	101	87	108	96	130	115	109	102
Tayside	90	80	104	100	96	86	88	82
Orkney	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	—
Shetland	3	2	8	8	3	2	3	3
Western Isles	5	5	6	5	10	10	13	13

[1]International Classification of Diseases

Deaths of Women from (a) Cervical Cancer (ICD[1] 180) and (b) Breast Cancer (ICD[1] 174) by Health Board Area, 1982 to 1985

Health Board Area	1982 All ages	1982 45 and over	1983 All ages	1983 45 and over	1984 All ages	1984 45 and over	1985 All ages	1985 45 and over
(a) Cervical cancer								
Scotland	208	183	213	177	227	183	214	174
Borders	—	—	3	3	4	3	8	6
Forth Valley	60	5	8	8	14	11	17	16
Dumfries and Galloway	6	6	8	6	6	5	5	5
Fife	19	18	23	19	22	20	18	17
Grampian	12	11	14	10	21	17	16	11
Highland	6	6	10	7	10	8	3	2
Lothian	29	25	30	26	31	22	28	22
Argyle and Clyde	19	16	19	17	19	16	19	14
Ayrshire and Arran	25	19	10	8	20	17	13	9
Greater Glasgow	43	39	43	36	49	39	34	27
Lanarkshire	25	23	33	26	16	12	32	26
Tayside	13	11	10	10	13	11	19	17
Orkney	1	1	2	1	—	—	1	1
Shetland	2	2	—	—	—	—	1	1
Western Isles	2	1	—	—	2	2	—	—
(b) Breast cancer								
Scotland	1,228	1,145	1,262	1,173	1,242	1,154	1,252	1,160
Borders	30	28	27	26	37	37	37	32
Forth Valley	60	56	64	62	85	78	80	73
Dumfries and Galloway	21	20	35	33	34	33	32	30
Fife	72	70	79	73	69	65	87	82
Grampian	116	110	116	107	86	82	91	82
Highland	43	38	38	36	52	48	49	45
Lothian	188	178	184	177	162	151	156	145
Argyle and Clyde	131	123	118	108	125	120	106	96
Ayrshire and Arran	76	68	95	84	96	88	113	104
Greater Glasgow	248	230	263	246	243	225	253	246
Lanarkshire	120	110	128	113	123	102	113	102
Tayside	103	96	97	91	108	103	115	105
Orkney	6	5	3	3	5	5	2	2
Shetland	5	5	7	7	10	10	8	6
Western Isles	9	8	8	7	7	7	10	10

[1]International Classification of Diseases

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mr. Babu Lal Gupta

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what access was sought by officers of the Customs and Excise to an Indian diplomat, Babu Lal Gupta; and what was the outcome of their inquiries into allegations of drug trafficking.

Mr. Brooke: Mr. Babu Lal Gupta did not claim diplomatic immunity and was interviewed by officers of Customs and Excise with the full co-operation of the Indian High Commission on 8 June 1984. The interview, in connection with the seizure of 4·5 kgs of heroin from Mr. Hans Raj Sharma at London Heathrow airport on 30 May 1984 did not further the officers' inquiry. Later in June, on completion of his tour of duty in the United Kingdom, Mr. Gupta returned to India.

Inland Revenue (Computerisation)

Mr. Colvin asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the computerisation of the Inland Revenue will be completed.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Inland Revenue is carrying out a number of major computerisation projects. The computerisation of the entire PAYE and schedule D systems will have been completed as planned by the end of 1988. This will be followed by a further project in local tax offices which will computerise the making of tax assessments on the earnings of companies. The Department has also embarked on a computerisation project in local collection offices to provide an on-line computer system. These projects should all have been completed by the early 1990s.

Customs and Excise (Overtime Budget)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information is available through *(a)* management information systems and *(b)* other reporting arrangements of the nature and extent of the operational consequences for Customs and Excise preventive work of budget ceilings for overtime working; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what range of duties of Customs and Excise officers engaged in preventive work require regular or rostered use of overtime; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will name and describe the administrative units to which overtime budgets are allocated for Customs and Excise preventive work; and if he will make a statement.

(4) if he will name and describe the budgets controlled at local and regional levels to provide overtime working on Customs and Excise preventive work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The financial provision for the payment of overtime in the preventive service of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is made in the Department's overtime budget which is administered by collectors controlling budget centres from regional offices (collections).

Management information and other reporting arrangements exist which enable the Department to determine the allocations of overtime budgets against perceived operational requirements. Most of the duties laid to preventive officers require some measure of regular or rostered overtime.

Civil and Public Services Association

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the result of the recent re-run of the Civil and Public Services Association election for general secretary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: As the hon. Member for Leicester, East has noted in early day motion No. 382, Mr. John Ellis has been elected to the post of general secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association.

EC (Economic and Financial Policy)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of economic and financial matters.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Latham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the financial loss to Government revenues if the exemption threshold for value added tax were raised to £50,000 *(a)* for the remainder of the current financial year and *(b)* for the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Brooke: The revenue loss would depend crucially on the number of businesses that decided to deregister if the exemption threshold were raised. But the loss in 1987-88 from an increase in the threshold to £50,000 could be expected to be between £100 million and £200 million. The effect on revenue in 1986-87 of an immediate change cannot be estimated because of uncertainties about the likely timing of businesses' decisions to deregister, but it would probably be slight.

Works of Art

Mr. Faulds asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will make representations to the European Economic Community Commissioners regarding the seventh directive on the harmonisation of value added tax on works of art; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications for museums and galleries and private art collectors and benefactors of the seventh directive on the harmonisation of value added tax on works of art; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The draft seventh VAT directive, which was first proposed by the EC Commission in 1978, is still under discussion at official level: it would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene at this stage. But I am aware of the effect which the proposed draft directive would have on museums and galleries and private art collectors and benefactors. Their views will continue to inform the British position in the Brussels negotiations. Draft VAT directives require unanimous agreement in the Council of Ministers before they can be adopted.

Free Trade Zones

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress to date of each of the free trade zones.

Mr. Brooke: The present position is as follows:

Belfast:
Customs approval to start operations expected soon; operator reports numerous inquiries but no firm commitments from potential users.

Birmingham: (West Midlands)
Opened on 27 November 1986; one user at present, another has been authorised to trade, four other applications are under consideration.

Cardiff:
Yet to start operations.

Liverpool:
Opened on 20 December 1984; 37 traders at present authorised to use free zone; in 1986 calendar year 190,000 tons of goods (value £60 million) passed through free zone.

Prestwick:
Ceased operations on 31 October 1986 though Kyle and Carrick District Council at present considering ways in which the company may be revived.

Southampton:
Opened on 30 September 1985; at present two users; annual throughput about £15 million.

Goods and Services (Tax Yield)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated tax yield of section 79 of the Finance Act 1972 in the current year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that no information on the tax yield from section 79 of the Finance Act 1972 is available centrally.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of overseas investment in both current and constant price terms each year since 1960, with direct and portfolio investment differentiated for each year.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the annual percentage change in total output since 1970, using the output measure of gross domestic product at constant factor cost; and what has been the annual percentage change in the total excluding the extraction of oil and gas.

Mr. MacGregor: Between 1970 and the third quarter of 1986, the most recent period for which data are available, the output measure of gross domestic product increased at an average rate of 1·8 per cent. per year. The corresponding figure for all industries other than oil and gas extraction is 1·4 per cent.

Income Tax

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the gain or loss to those with incomes *(a)* under £5,000, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* £20,000 to £30,000, *(f)* £30,000 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,000 to £70,000 and over £70,000 a year as a result of each Finance Act since 1979, both in aggregate and per person on average in each of these categories, in each case indicating how much is due to indexation and how much is real gain.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the research report commissioned by the Treasury, recently completed, into the incentive effects of income tax cuts.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 18 December to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) at column *668*.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the annual percentage increase in real personal disposable income each year since 1957.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 4 December 1986 at column *776*.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, for the financial year 1986-87, he will indicate the number of taxpayers expected to receive relief on mortgage interest and the anticipated average relief per mortgagor, for those with annual incomes of *(a)* £30,000 to £40,000, *(b)* £40,000 to £50,000, *(c)* £50,000 to £60,000, *(d)* £60,000 to £70,000 and *(e)* over £70,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates based on projections from the 1984-85 survey of personal incomes are as follows:

Tax units[1] receiving mortgage interest relief by range of total income—1986-87

Range of total income £'000	*Numbers receiving mortgage relief* '000	*Average value of relief per mortgagor* £	*Total cost of relief* £ million
30 to 40	215	1,060	230
40 to 50	70	1,330	90
50 to 60	25	1,500	40
60 to 70	15	1,550	20
Over 70	25	1,650	40
TOTAL	350	1,210	420

[1] Single persons and married couples.

United Nations International Years

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list Her Majesty's Government's contributions to United Kingdom organisations set up in each of the past eight years in respect of designated United Nations international years.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cigarettes

Mr. Coombs asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was his forecast of the consumption of cigarettes following the 1986 Budget; what is his current forecast; and to what extent the difference in these forecasts is attributable to the importation of foreign cigarettes.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *747*]: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not publish estimates of the consumption of cigarettes, though of course in forming his Budget judgment he takes into account the likely effects of tax changes on the market. In the nine months to September, clearances of cigarettes were down by about 7·5 per cent. on the corresponding period of 1985. At present, about 11·5 per cent. of clearances are accounted for by imported cigarettes. This represents an increase in volume of about 3·5 per cent. on the previous year.

Mortgages

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish any information he has on the distribution of outstanding mortgages which attract tax relief giving details of amount and length of mortgages and setting out any assumption used.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information on the distribution of outstanding mortgages which attract tax relief is not available from administrative tax data. Estimates of the distribution of mortgage interest payments which attract tax relief, based on projections to 1986-87 of information in the 1984-85 "Survey of Personal Incomes" and 1985 "Family Expenditure Survey," are given in the following table. These estimates include mortgages formerly under the option mortgage scheme, now subsumed under MIRAS.

The general level of mortgage interest rates in 1986-87 is assumed to be 11·5 per cent. as some lenders charge a different interest rate, the distribution of outstanding

mortgages cannot be derived accurately from the distribution of interest payments. Information on the length of mortgages is not available.

Tax units[1] receiving mortgage interest relief by range of mortgage interest which attracts tax relief—1986-87

Range of mortgage interest payments in 1986-87 which attract tax relief	*Numbers receiving mortgage interest tax relief[2] (thousands)*	*Amount of mortgage interest payments which attract tax relief (£ million)*
Under £500	1,050	280
£500 to £999	1,350	1,000
£1,000 to £1,499	1,340	1,660
£1,500 to £1,999	1,130	1,960
£2,000 to £2,499	920	2,050
£2,500 to £2,999	900	2,490
£3,000 and over	1,500	5,010
Total	8,200	14,450

[1] Single persons and married couples
[2] Including about 500,000 non-taxpayers

DEFENCE

Regiments (Other Entrants)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those regiments for which it is advisable that aspiring officer entrants have private incomes.

Mr. Freeman: The Army has no such requirements.

Binary Chemical Weapons

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been made of the likely effects on European security of the French Government's intention to develop a binary chemical weapon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: No studies have been made by Her Majesty's Government. The Government have noted the announcement by the French Government that France should possess an appropriate deterrent capacity of chemical weapons.

Armed Forces (Equipment Procurement)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arrangements exist to determine the operational requirements of major equipment to be procured for Her Majesty's forces; what person or committee is authorised to determine operational requirements at each stage *(a)* in concept formulation and in definition of staff target, *(b)* in feasibility study and in definition of staff requirement, *(c)* in project definition, if appropriate, and *(d)* in full development; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what arrangements existed to determine the operational requirements of major equipment to be procured for Her Majesty's forces at the times relevant to determining actions of the operational requirements for demountable rack off-loading pick-up systems; whether these arrangements have since been changed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list the dates on which a staff target for demountable rack off-loading pick-up system equipment was either stated or updated; what person or committee was authorised to determine the operational requirements contained in each such staff target; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will list the dates on which a staff requirement for demountable rack off-loading pick-up systems equipment was either stated or updated; what person or committee was authorised to determine the operational requirements contained in each such staff requirement; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he has received any guarantees regarding application of the United States of America Export Administration Act to offset orders in connection with the Boeing air warning aircraft system contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

Foreign Naval Vessels (United Kingdom Visits)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Soviet naval vessels have visited United Kingdom ports in each year since 1970; and if he will list *(a)* the port visited, *(b)* the name of the ship and *(c)* the type and class of ships.

Mr. Stanley: The following Soviet naval vessels have visited United Kingdom ports since 1970:

	1970	*1976*
Port	Leith	Portsmouth
Vessel	Arktica	Obraztovy
Type	Naval survey vessel	Destroyer
Class	Moma	Kashin

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States naval vessels have visited United Kingdom ports in each year since 1970; and if he will list *(a)* the ports visited, *(b)* the name of the ships, and *(c)* the type and class of ship.

Mr. Stanley: My Department estimates that, since 1970, around 800 United States naval vessels have visited various United Kingdom ports. Full records of such visits are not generally retained, and the complete information sought by the hon. Member could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I refer him, however, to the replies which I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) on 16 May 1985, at columns *209-10* and on 13 March 1984, at column *132*.

Ferranti Computer Assisted Command System

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of trials and operation of the Ferranti computer assisted command system on board Her Majesty's ships; what is the cost of development to date and the estimated additional cost prior to the system entering service; how these costs compare with the original estimate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A computer assisted command system, known as CACS1, is currently installed in Type 22 frigates and is undergoing extensive trials which are proving valuable in revealing the system's potential operational capability: CACS has not yet been formally accepted for full operational use. It is not the practice to publicise project costs which are commercially confidential between the Ministry of Defence and individual contractors.

Noise Compensation Policy

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has now completed the review of noise compensation policy; and if he will make a statement about the implications of the review generally and in the vicinity of RAF Leuchars particularly.

Mr. Freeman: The review of the Ministry's policy for providing sound insulation grants and compensation for noise in the vicinity of military airfields is complete. Certain changes have been approved bringing my Department's policy broadly in line with that applying to major civil airports. These changes were announced in an answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 14 November 1985 at columns *260-1*.

The most significant change as far as RAF Leuchars is concerned is the reduction of the qualifying level for sound insulation grants. I shall be announcing an extension to the existing noise compensation scheme at Leuchars shortly.

Armoured Divisions

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the annual cost of retaining an armoured division in the Federal Republic of Germany;

(2) what is the total annual cost of operating and maintaining a regiment of tanks.

Mr. Stanley: The annual running cost of an armoured division will depend on a number of factors including its composition, location and activity levels. On the basis of a division comprising five armoured regiments, five mechanised infantry battalions and appropriate signals, artillery and aviation support the average cost would be in excess of £200 million a year at current prices. This excludes, inter alia, the capital costs of equipment, indirect support, headquarters costs and accommodation. On the same basis the annual cost of a tank regiment is about £12 million.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average number of officers and men in an armoured division.

Mr. Freeman: The precise number of officers and men will depend on its composition and role, but the average peacetime establishment of an armoured division is approximately 13,000.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average number of tanks in an armoured division.

Mr. Freeman: It is not our practice to give details of the number of tanks in operational units or formations.

Challenger Tank (Cost)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the average cost of a Challenger tank;

(2) what is the average production cost of a Challenger tank.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current budgetary cost of a Challenger tank (fully equipped) is £1·5 million.

Nimrod Airframes

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future use of the eleven Nimrod airframes originally intended for the airborne early warning system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of possible uses for the eleven Nimrod airframes are under consideration.

Helicopters (Germany)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many squadrons of helicopters are currently based with the Royal Air Force in Germany; and if he will list the number of each type.

Mr. Stanley: Two squadrons of RAF helicopters are currently based in Germany, comprising one squadron of Chinooks and one squadron of Puma. It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many squadrons of helicopters are currently based in Germany with the British Army of the Rhine listing the number of each type.

Mr. Stanley: There are 10 Army air corps helicopter squadrons currently based in Germany operating Gazelle and Lynx helicopters. It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Combat Aircraft (Germany)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many squadrons of Royal Air Force fixed wing combat aircraft are currently based in Germany; and if he will list the number of each type.

Mr. Stanley: Twelve squadrons of RAF fixed wing combat aircraft are currently based in Germany, comprising seven squadrons of Tornado GR1, two squadrons of Harriers, two squadrons of Phantoms and one squadron of Jaguars. It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Army Horses (Stag Hunts)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to public funds of Army horses being used in stag hunts in the New Forest on 17 November and 8 December, respectively.

Mr. Freeman: Horses from the Household Cavalry regiment participated in hunting in the New Forest on 17 November and 8 December 1986 at the invitation of the New Forest Buckhounds. No additional costs to public funds arose from their participation, apart from minor transportation costs from nearby RAF Sopley, where the regiment had arranged military and equestrian training.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army horses were used in stag hunts in the New Forest on 17 November and 8 December, respectively.

Mr. Freeman: Seven Army horses on 17 November and six on 8 December 1986.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during the last five years Army horses have been used in stag hunts; and how many have been injured.

Mr. Freeman: Army horses do not usually hunt with stag hounds, although they did so on two occasions at the end of last year. This was for the first time in recent years. No horses were injured.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what funds accrue to his Department for the hiring of horses to be used in stag hunts in the New Forest.

Mr. Freeman: None, as Army horses are not hired out for this purpose.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what regiments Army horses are attached which were used for stag hunts in the New Forest on 17 November and 8 December.

Mr. Freeman: The horses belonged to the Household Cavalry regiment based in London.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers and men, of which regiments, and of what rank and trade were involved in the transport of hunting horses to the New Forest on 17 November and 8 December.

Mr. Freeman: Three drivers, lance corporals from the Blues and Royals, were responsible for the transportation of horses to the New Forest from RAF Sopley (two on 17 November 1986 and one on 8 December 1986). In addition, the following also participated in the hunting on 17 November.

Number	*Rank*	*Regiment*	*Appointment*
1	Lieutenant	The Blues and Royals	Troop Leader
1	Corporal of Horse	The Blues and Royals	Troop Corporal of Horse
1	Corporal of Horse	The Life Guards	Troop Corporal of Horse
1	Lance Corporal of Horse	The Blues and Royals	Troop NCO
1	Trooper	The Blues and Royals	Mounted Dutyman
2	Trooper	The Life Guards	Mounted Dutyman

Number	*Rank*	*Regiment*	*Appointment*
and on 8 December			
1	Lieutenant	The Blues and Royals	Troop Leader
1	Corporal of Horse	The Blues and Royals	Troop Corporal of Horse
1	Lance Corporal of Horse	The Blues and Royals	Troop NCO
2	Lance Corporal	The Blues and Royals	Troop NCO
2	Trooper	The Blues and Royals	Mounted Dutyman

Trident

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the evidence upon which he based his assessment of the number of tank regiments that could be maintained if Trident expenditure was switched to conventional defence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Our assessment is that over 20 years the cost of maintaining one armoured division (including the capital costs over that period of necessary re-equipment) would be some £8·9 billion compared to the costs of buying Trident over its 20 year procurement period of £9·9 billion both at average 1985-86 prices. The costs quoted are based on the largest existing armoured division which is assumed to be equipped to current average standards initially. They exclude therefore any additional captial costs of equipping a division from new and of providing land and buildings to accommodate the servicemen concerned and their families.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the latest estimated lifetime running costs of the Trident submarines.

Mr. Stanley: The running costs of Trident should not be significantly different from those for our existing Polaris force. We estimate that at their peak, Trident running costs will amount to some £220 million per annum (at 1985/86 prices) which represents approximately 1·2 per cent. of the current value of the Defence Budget.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the Trident project to the nearest convenient date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: To the end of December 1986, some £820 million had been spent on the Trident project. £2,750 million has been contractually committed.

Tanks

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops are required to operate and maintain a regiment of tanks.

Mr. Stanley: The precise numbers vary according to its composition and role, but about 600 officers and men are required for the operation and first line maintenance of an armoured regiment. However, the second and third line administrative, transport and workshop support required are not allocated on a regimental basis.

Mr. Trafford Boughton

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if any attempt was made by his Department to solicit from Mr. Trafford Boughton a letter disociating himself and his company from the British Broadcasting Corporation "Panorama" programme of 7 July 1986 on the awarding of the DROPS contract;

(2) if it was with ministerial authority that Major General Stevan Stopford telephoned Mr. Trafford Boughton on 30 June 1986 requesting him to send a letter immediately to the Department disociating himself and his company from the British Broadcasting Corporation "Panorama" programme of 7 July 1986 on the awarding of the DROPS contract;

(3) if it was with ministerial authority that officials of his Department *(a)* spoke on the telephone to Mr. Trafford Boughton in April and May 1986 and *(b)* to him in person at the British Army equipment exhibition concerning a proposed television programme on the awarding of the DROPS contract;

(4) if his Department keeps any record of *(a)* telephone conversations and *(b)* informal discussions between officials and defence contractors or potential defence contractors.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list initiatives by his Department which have been of benefit specifically to the north-east, north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside regions since 1979.

Mr. Fowler: All these localities have benefited from the increases in expenditure on health, personal social services and social security since 1979.

The Government have protected and increased the real value of nearly all the major social security benefits and the Social Security Act 1986 will introduce major reforms designed to target help more effectively, simplifying the system and tackling the worst effects of the poverty and unemployment traps.

Many initiatives are being undertaken by local social security offices to increase public awareness of the many benefits on offer. These include a project based at Bradford to provide an interpreting and translating service for members of the Asian community and an advice surgery run by Manchester central ILO. Regional freephone services have been introduced and a special eight page benefit supplement was compiled for publication by the *Liverpool Echo*.

The relevant regional health authorities (Northern, Yorkshire, Mersey and North Western) have benefited from the Government's policy of giving higher increases in funding to those National Health Service regions which have historically received less than their fair share of resources. Gross revenue spending has risen from £1,212 million in 1978-79 to £2,688 million in 1985-86—a real terms increase of 17·6 per cent. compared with a real increase of 15·2 per cent. for England as a whole. Gross capital spending over the same period rose from £115·4 million to £243·3 million—an increase of 19·9 per cent. in real terms.

Since 1979, 64 health building schemes, each costing more than £1 million, have been completed. The schemes include the major developments at Queen Elizabeth and North Tyneside district general hospitals, a new district general hospital at Grimsby, the Countess of Chester nucleus development and phases 1 and 2 of Preston New hospital. The table following sets out the 64 schemes mentioned.

Centrally the Department has provided funds for 15 projects to enable mentally handicapped children to be moved from long stay hospitals. Over £1·5 million has been given to develop five special projects for the mentally ill. This includes £400,000 to develop local community psychiatric services in inner city Leeds. More than £1,600,000 has been given to develop services for the elderly mentally ill. Ten projects have been funded including the creation of a family support unit in South Tees (£403,000) and a daycare and night sitting service in Stockport (£282,000). Over £1 million has been spent on a "Homely Care" scheme for the elderly mentally ill in Liverpool.

Since 1983 more than £2 million has been spent on funding initiatives designed to improve primary health care in inner city areas and to train additional community nursing staff. Twenty two family practitioner committees have computerized their records as part of a national programme to improve services to patients and general efficiency.

Local authority expenditure on personal social services has risen from £335 million in 1978-79 to £709 million in 1984-85—a real terms increase of 19 per cent.

The Department has allocated £4·6 million over three years since 1983 to pump prime 38 projects designed for drug misusers. These include a community based project providing prevention and treatment services in Tyneside (£300,000) and an outpatient clinic in Liverpool (£541,000). An additional £1,391,000 has been given in 1986-87 to be spent specifically on the development of services for drug misusers.

The locality has benefited from the funding of national voluntary bodies under the general scheme of section 64 grants. Additional money has been made available to fund various projects under the initiative "Helping the Community to Care"—designed to encourage voluntary help in the community.

Nine of the 28 projects funded so far in the special "Care in the Community" initiative, designed to encourage the shift of patients from long stay hospitals to the community, are in the locality. A total of more than £4·5 million has been spent. The projects include a home care support scheme for 60 elderly people in Darlington, a project for 32 mentally handicapped people in Fielden and Stanstead View hospitals, one for 20 elderly mentally infirm people from Rainhill hospital and one for 40 mentally ill people in the Ormskirk and Winwick hospitals. A further £1·25 million is expected to be allocated to the locality in the future.

Over £1·75 million has been allocated to 36 projects under the "Under Fives" initiative designed to help families with young children, especially those in low income, socially isolated situations.

More than £5·25 million has been allocated to projects under the "Intermediate Treatment" initiative, designed to offer an alternative to custodial sentencing for young offenders, and in 1985-86 more than £130,000 was assigned to other projects by the Intermediate Treatment Fund committee from its central allocation.

Northern RHA

Fenham Blood Transfusion Service Centre
Furness (Barrow) DGH scheme 1 phase 1
Furness general scheme 1 phase 2
Hartlepool DGH scheme 2 phase 1
Hartlepool DGH scheme 3 phase 4
Jarrow community hospital
North Tyneside scheme 1 phase 1
Queen Elizabeth Gateshead scheme 3 phase 1
Queen Elizabeth Gateshead scheme 3 phase 2
Royal Victoria Infirmary scheme 1 phase 4
South Cleveland general scheme 1 phase 1

Number of schemes = 11

Yorkshire RHA

Bradford Royal Infirmary nucleus wards and Theatres
Grimsby DGH phase 1
Leeds General Infirmary phase 1
Pontefract General Infirmary
Regional Blood Transfusion Centre seacroft phase
Regional Secure Unit Wakefield
Scarborough DGH phase 1 (nucleus)
Scunthorpe DGH phase 3a service centre
Staincliffe DGH energy centre

Number of schemes = 9

Mersey RHA
Alder Hey new boiler house
Arrowe Park new DGH
Broadgreen—cardiology/cardio thoracic unit
Countess of Chester—nucleus (West Cheshire)
Halton DGH phase 2 (nucleus)
Halton hospital residential accommodation
Macclesfield development (nucleus)
Mossley Hill ESMI unit
Rainhill regional secure unit
Regional stores
Royal Liverpool phases 2 and 3
Southport Infirmary—new main block
St. Helens redevelopment phase 1 geriatric

Number of schemes = 13

North Western RHA
Blackpool Victoria phase 4
Bolton DGH—boiler house
Bolton DGH ESMI and geriatric unit
Bolton DGH MIU
Burnley General Hospital phase 3
Fairfield boiler house
Fleetwood ESMI
Hope Hospital Salford phase 1
Leigh Infirmary 2nd MI unit
Leigh Infirmary HSDU substation and roadworks
Manchester Royal Infirmary—MIDU
Manchester Royal Infirmary ESMI unit
Manchester Royal Infirmary phase 1
Oldham DGH ESMI unit
Oldham DGH temporary accommodation
Park Hospital geriatric and rehabilitation
Preston new hospital phase 1
Preston new hospital phase 2
Prestwich Hospital adolescent secure unit
Prestwich Hospital adult secure unit
Queen Victoria Hospital—phase 1
Regional Blood Transfusion Centre
Rochdale ESMI
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary Wigan boiler house
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary Wigan phase one
Royal Lancaster Infirmary phase 2
Royal Preston accommodation
Royal Preston administration and accommodation
Shards Green—maternity and gynaecology
Stepping Hill manufacturing pharmacy
Tameside General geriatric unit

Number of schemes = 31

Housing Benefit

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the average housing benefit payments per week in Great Britain in respect of *(a)* rates, *(b)* private sector rent and *(c)* public sector rent;

(2) what is the latest estimate of the number of people receiving assistance under the housing benefit scheme in respect of *(a)* private sector rents, *(b)* public sector rents and *(c)* rates, giving the benefit costs applicable in each of these cases, and the estimated numbers and costs in respect of the changes to take effect in April 1987.

Mr. Lyell: On the basis of local authority subsidy claims, the latest estimates of the current number of people receiving assistance under the housing benefits scheme, the annual cost and the average amount per beneficiary are as follows:

Great Britain, 1986-87

	£'s (millions)	Caseload (millions)	Average Weekly Amount (£)
Rent rebate	2,410	3·75	12·40
Rent allowance	950	1·19	15·40
Rate rebate	1,640	7·12	4·40

All standard housing benefit recipients (around 3·5 million) will be affected by next April's uprating, and total housing benefit expenditure will be an estimated £68 million lower than would otherwise have been the case as a result of the announced measures.

Notes:
Rent rebates represent rent assistance for public sector rents and rent allowances help for private sector rents. Most recipients of help with rents will also receive rate rebates.

Single Payments

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps are being taken to clear the backlog of supplementary benefit single payment claims in the Camberwell, Peckham and Kennington Department of Health and Social Security offices; and what steps are being taken to prepare for the processing of claims likely to be generated as a result of the forthcoming campaign by the welfare benefits resources network on heating additions.

Mr. Lyell: Several measures have been taken to deal with outstanding single payment claims in the Department's offices in Camberwell, Peckham and Kennington (Oval).

Some single payment work from local offices in London south region has been outstationed to the Chatham and Broadstairs offices where 24 additional staff (12 at each office) have been recruited to deal exclusively with this work. Both Chatham and Broadstairs are currently dealing with single payment work from the Kennington (Oval) office and similar work from Peckham will be outstationed to Broadstairs from 18 December 1986. In addition staff have been diverted to this work from other work not connected with the payment of benefit and from the London south regional office.

Camberwell, Peckham, Kennington (Oval) and Kennington park offices have, between them, received an additional 58 staff above the number justified by normal staffing arrangements as their share of the extra 5,000 allocated to local offices this year.

Discussions are continuing between regional management and the welfare benefits resources network about the forthcoming benefits campaign.

Orthopaedic Surgery

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many district health authorities are unable to perform elective orthopaedic surgery; and if he will give a comparable list for 1979.

Mr. Newton: During 1985, the latest year for which information is available centrally, and in 1979, Halton

district health authority was the only district health authority without beds available in the specialty of traumatic and orthopaedic surgery. Mersey regional health authority's provisional decision is to include 32 traumatic and orthopaedic beds in phase III of Halton district general hospital planned for 1992. Currently, Halton residents look towards Chester, St. Helens and Knowsley, Warrington and Liverpool district health authorities for provision of orthopaedic services.

There may also be limited periods when, for short-term reasons, other authorities are unable to perform elective orthopaedic surgery.

Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he last issued guidance to the South Western regional health authority concerning the implementation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 in regard to late abortions; and what that guidance was.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant), for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) on 10 December 1986 at column *214*.

National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1986

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he plans to commence implementation of the provisions of the National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1986.

Mr. Newton: Sections 1 and 2 (application of food legislation and health and safety legislation to health authorities and health boards) will come into force on 7 February 1987. No decision has yet been taken on when to implement section 3 (pharmaceutical services). Section 4 (remuneration of the family pratitioner contractor professions) came into force on 7 November. Section 5 (joint-planning of health services in Scotland) contains two new sections to the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978.

Section 13A came into force on 7 November; section 13B, which provides back-up powers to the present voluntary arrangements for joint-planning of health services in Scotland, will be brought into force only if the voluntary arrangements fail to meet their objectives. The miscellaneous provisions in sections 6 to 8 came into force on 7 November.

Departmental Office, Shettleston

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans there are to build a new office of his Department in Shettleston; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: The Department is considering replacing the existing overcrowded office at Springfield road, Parkhead, with a new office in the Shettleston area of Glasgow. Siting the proposed office in Shettleston will make it more accessible for the public it serves. Some other minor boundary changes affecting neighbouring local offices are also being considered.

NHS (Consultants)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has for each of the last 10 years of the average earnings of National Health Service consultants from private practice.

Mr. Newton: I regret the information requested is not collected centrally.

Senior House Officers

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors have been members of the senior house officer grade in each region for *(a)* three years or more and *(b)* five years or more.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Medical senior house officers in NHS hospitals at 30 September 1985:
Analysis by region and time spent in the grade
England

	3 years or more	*5 years or more*
England	2,050	917
Northern	126	53
Yorkshire	158	75
Trent	195	103
East Anglian	80	30
N. W. Thames	109	48
N. E. Thames	156	61
S. E. Thames	170	74
S. W. Thames	111	52
Wessex	75	27
Oxford	107	52
South Western	148	48
West Midlands	214	102
Mersey	116	59
North Western	264	131
Special health authorities		
London post graduate teaching hospitals	21	2

Health Education Council

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he plans to appoint members of the special health authority replacing the Health Education Council; and how they will be selected.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend hopes to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what degree of control he expects to exercise over the special health authority replacing the Health Education Council, in terms of funding and programme content; and what is the degree of control currently exercised over the council on comparable matters.

Mr. Newton: Systems of financial control and programme review similar to those operating within the National Health Service were introduced into the Health Education Council in 1985 and they are likely to be carried forward by the new authority.

Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to seek to remove discrimination by sex in entitlement to state pensions and related benefits.

Mr. Major: Discrimination by sex has already been largely removed from social security benefits. We have no present plans to remove those areas of unequal treatment, such as pension age, which falls outside the scope of European Community Directive 79/7. We are still considering the implications for benefit provision of European Community Directive 86/378, on occupational social security, the main provisions of which must be implemented by January 1993. We have already gone beyond the requirements of this directive in the new pension arrangements introduced by the Social Security Act 1986, which provide for equal annuities for equal premiums in relation to the proceeds of minimum contributions to personal pensions and money purchase employers' pension schemes contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many uncleared claims for supplementary benefit, how many items of unlinked post and how many uncleared claims for single payments there were at each local social security office in the London north and south regions at the latest available date; and what were the comparable figures for 1979 and 1983.

Mr. Lyell: Tables giving the information available have been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current average interval between claim and initial payment for each social security benefit; and what were the comparable figures in 1979 and 1983.

Mr. Lyell: Based on the latest available data the average time taken between the date of claim and when a decision on the claim is made is as follows:

Benefit	*1986*	*1983*	*1979*
Attendance Allowance	8·3 weeks	12·5 weeks	*
Invalid Care Allowance	15·1 weeks	*	*
Mobility Allowance	8·5 weeks	14·5 weeks	13·5 weeks
Child Benefit			
a. Straightforward claim (See note 1)	3·81 days	3·58 days	12·09 days
b. Non-straightforward claim (See note 2)	14·16 days	10·20 days	26·40 days
One-Parent Benefit	11·73 days	7·9 days	*
Maternity Benefit	11 days (see note 3)	7 days	12 days
Sickness/Invalidity (see note 4)	9 days	9 days	6 days
Supplementary Benefit	6 days	6 days	5 days
Family Income Supplement	23 days	*	*

Notes:
(1)—Claims processed by computer
(2)—Claims processed clerically
(3)—Excludes non-contributory maternity grant for which separate information is not held
(4)—Separate figures not available.
* Not retained
Information is not available to show the interval between a decision being made and the initial payment nor is information in the form requested available for the remaining social security benefits not listed.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications for judicial review are currently in process regarding delays in payments of benefits by his Department.

Mr. Lyell: Five.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of claims for supplementary benefit to his Department's Liverpool offices during 1986 were not met within 14 days; and what percentage of total claims this represents.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have the information available as soon as possible.

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Social services whether he has received advice from the Social Security Advisory Committee on the operation of regulations governing unemployment benefit payments to those regularly engaged in seasonal work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: The Social Security Advisory Committee has issued a consultation document on the operation of the seasonal workers' regulations and it has set 12 February 1987 as the closing date for responses. I expect that the committee will go on to consider the question and prepare its report in the light of those responses.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for supplementary benefit take more than 14 days before payment is made after first applications in each social security office; what proportion of supplementary benefit claims this represents in each office; and what is the average number of weeks delay before supplementary benefit claims are met at each office.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have the information that is available as soon as possible.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average interval between the lodging of an appeal and the tribunal hearing for each social security benefit in each year.

Mr. Lyell: I refer the hon. Member to tables 49.02A and 49.02B in "Social Security Statistics 1986" (HMSO). Comparable statistics for all social security benefit appeals were not collected prior to April 1984.

Whitley Councils (Trade Union Recognition)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he plans to seek further powers to recognise trade unions within the Whitley council framework.

Mr. Newton: No.

Dental Estimates

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the numbers of estimates scheduled per dentist in each of the months November and December 1981-85 inclusive, and January to October 1986.

Mrs. Currie: Precise information cannot be provided in the form requested. Figures for the number of general dental services dentists are available only on a six-monthly basis up to 1983 and on a quarterly basis thereafter. The figures in the following table have therefore been estimated.

England

Year	*Number of estimates scheduled*
1981	
November	203
December	200
1982	
November	196
December	197
1983	
November	195
December	191
1984	
November	190
December	197
1985	
November	193
December	175
1986	
January	186
February	180
March	187
April	185
May	197
June	191
July	180
August	172
September	179
October	196

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the report of the Dental Estimates Board for 1985-86 to be published; how many dental estimates for examination and report only were received and processed in each month in 1986, for which figures are available; and how many cases were made using the claim form FP 17E.

Mrs. Currie: We have received the report of the Dental Estimates Board for the year 1985 together with a supplementary report for January to March 1986.

Information on the numbers of examination and report only estimates and FP 17E cases which were scheduled for payment in the first eleven months of 1986 is as follows:

	Examination and report only estimates	*(England and Wales) Examination and report only estimates on form FP 17E*
January	449,416	270,172
February	426,418	264,407
March	427,998	266,671
April	425,589	278,847
May	458,947	307,556
June	430,443	293,985
July	407,241	256,731
August	371,299	242,669
September	398,412	268,739
October	442,873	290,732
November	442,873	297,534

Artificial Limbs and Appliances

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total cost of the service providing artificial limbs and appliances in each of the last five years; what has been the cost in real terms, after allowing for inflation, in each of these years; and what has been the change in cost in real terms since 1979.

Mr. Major: The total cost (including administration costs) of the limb service are not separately identified but the following is the expenditure incurred on the supply, fitting and repair of artificial limbs in each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1985-86, together with expenditure figures adjusted in line with the annual movement of the retail price index:

Year	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Expenditure at Current prices*[1] £
1979-80	18,683,752	28,270,061
1980-81	22,714,884	30,521,126
1981-82	26,453,952	32,210,683
1982-83	28,524,780	33,196,267
1983-84	31,905,404	35,279,925
1984-85	33,136,582	34,539,524
1985-86	36,067,562	36,067,562

[1] Adjusted by reference to the annual movement in the retail price index.

The increase in real terms since 1979-80 is therefore £7,797,501.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in what ways he is proposing to strengthen the management arrangements at the artificial limb and appliance centres; and what progress he has made with his proposals.

Mr. Major: Proposals are being developed to devolve more responsibility, authority and discretion to management at local level in the artificial limb and appliance service in order to improve the services provided for patients.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the action that has been taken to improve the transport arrangements for patients attending artificial limb centres, indicating the improvements that have already been implemented; and if he will estimate the cost of the planned improvements.

Mr. Major: Operational research studies are being undertaken to fully diagnose problems in the movement of patients to, their flow through and return from artificial limb and appliance centres, and to identify possible solutions. Local initiatives to improve transport, in collaboration with local ambulance authorities, are being

tested and evaluated at various limb centres with a view to general implementation. As we have not yet completed our research, we are not yet in a position to provide an estimate of any additional costs that may be incurred when improvements are implemented.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services from which organisations and individuals he has received representations regarding the proposal in the McColl report for a management board or special health authority to oversee the artificial limb and appliance centres; if he will indicate which of the representations favoured the proposals and which were opposed; and when he intends to make a decision.

Mr. Major: A wide range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the artificial limb and appliance centre (ALAC) services have now let us have their views on the McColl report and its recommendations. During the formal consultation period 87 submissions were received and representations have been made subsequently by about 330 hon. and right hon. Members and others. A large majority accepted the need for changes in the organisation and management arrangements, but there was no concensus on the structure that was most likely to facilitate the improvements in service delivery which everyone wants to see. Opinion amongst the patients' groups that responded to our invitation to comment was divided between those that expressed a clear preference for the independent management board recommended by the working party and those that saw no particular advantage in it.

A number of suppliers and trades unions involved with the ALAC services favoured some strengthening of management arrangements, but argued that the Department should retain its present responsibilities for them. Most professional interests considered integration with other National Health Service services at local level to be the best way of securing better co-ordination of services at the point of delivery to amputees and wheelchair users. We are considering all the comments that we have received together with the recent Royal College of Physicians' report on physical disability and will take decisions on future organisational arrangements as soon as possible.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards the level of resources in real terms to be devoted to the artificial limb and appliance service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Sufficient resources will be made available to maintain the artificial limb and appliance service at the appropriate level. Financial provision for the year 1987-88 will be put to Parliament in estimates in the usual way. I refer the right hon. Member to the statement that I made on 26 November 1986 at columns 327-34.

Prosthetists (Training)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress is being made with discussions concerning the future training of prosthetists.

Mr. Major: At a meeting of parties interested in the future of prosthetic and orthotic education and training arranged by the Department on 1 October it was agreed to set up a small working party to visit some of the education and training establishments which are running or have expressed an interest in running courses for prosthetists to discuss their proposals. These visits should be completed by the middle of January after which we expect the interested parties to meet again to consider the working party's findings.

Babies (Mortality)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his Department holds on the seasonal mortality of babies in the first year of life.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows the number of deaths at age under one year by sex and month of occurrence for England and Wales from 1981 to 1985. Statistics of infant mortality by quarter year of registration are published routinely in tables 9 and 21 of "Population Trends", copies of which may be found in the Library.

Number of infant deaths by month of occurrence, sex and age-group England and Wales, 1981-1985

Month of occurrence	*Age group*	*Year*									
		1981		*1982*		*1983*		*1984*		*1985*	
		Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
January	Under 1 year	381	257	384	303	336	250	359	265	344	236
	Under 1 week	180	105	153	107	147	102	163	105	134	91
	1 week-under 1 month	36	30	28	33	37	32	28	23	37	23
	1 month-under 1 year	165	122	203	163	152	116	168	137	173	122
February	Under 1 year	349	276	324	250	375	254	309	245	257	233
	Under 1 week	144	117	139	113	151	98	133	100	103	84
	1 week-under 1 month	56	28	34	20	38	33	37	30	25	37
	1 month-under 1 year	149	131	151	117	186	123	139	115	129	112
March	Under 1 year	402	257	354	270	354	265	379	269	307	230
	Under 1 week	195	125	168	115	150	123	153	121	136	109
	1 week-under 1 month	41	27	38	42	50	32	43	21	28	26
	1 month-under 1 year	166	105	148	113	154	110	183	127	143	95
April	Under 1 year	323	224	310	222	298	205	256	214	320	238
	Under 1 week	163	95	146	117	133	97	125	97	158	106
	1 week-under 1 month	34	25	26	25	39	21	29	36	27	31
	1 month-under 1 year	126	104	138	80	126	87	102	81	135	101

Month of occurrence	Age group	Year									
		1981		1982		1983		1984		1985	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
May	Under 1 year	335	235	295	218	319	222	280	213	264	207
	Under 1 week	178	117	150	112	142	118	151	108	138	102
	1 week-under 1 month	44	37	32	24	35	14	27	25	25	24
	1 month-under 1 year	113	81	113	82	142	90	102	80	101	81
June	Under 1 year	341	220	287	220	257	220	228	200	259	195
	Under 1 week	190	122	168	112	134	121	108	101	143	104
	1 week-under 1 month	57	26	39	30	31	25	33	17	25	30
	1 month-under 1 year	94	72	80	78	92	74	87	82	91	61
July	Under 1 year	313	236	305	211	266	235	271	182	284	209
	Under 1 week	174	118	173	109	145	127	151	92	156	115
	1 week-under 1 month	42	31	41	27	40	29	38	29	32	24
	1 month-under 1 year	97	87	91	75	81	79	82	61	96	70
August	Under 1 year	302	221	268	204	249	186	241	165	246	182
	Under 1 week	167	125	144	129	144	110	137	81	143	103
	1 week-under 1 month	50	34	41	31	31	25	29	30	31	18
	1 month-under 1 year	85	62	83	44	74	51	75	54	72	61
September	Under 1 year	266	208	288	186	261	205	245	171	244	199
	Under 1 week	142	118	148	100	130	100	135	78	124	105
	1 week-under 1 month	30	27	33	17	19	30	33	16	29	32
	1 month-under 1 year	94	63	107	69	112	75	77	77	91	62
October	Under 1 year	343	234	351	228	285	210	278	218	289	227
	Under 1 week	155	103	158	94	125	105	126	99	143	112
	1 week-under 1 month	45	32	44	36	38	17	37	33	30	20
	1 month-under 1 year	143	99	149	98	122	88	115	86	116	95
November	Under 1 year	357	233	322	244	311	216	291	212	351	226
	Under 1 week	152	100	152	99	121	92	137	93	130	89
	1 week-under 1 month	44	23	35	27	36	18	38	33	35	23
	1 month-under 1 year	161	110	135	118	154	106	116	86	186	114
December	Under 1 year	424	306	389	293	358	245	287	231	349	242
	Under 1 week	155	108	135	99	150	87	122	104	129	90
	1 week-under 1 month	34	37	38	36	34	24	33	21	44	28
	1 month-under 1 year	235	161	216	158	174	134	132	106	176	124

Health Authorities (Membership Nominations)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *407-8*, what form the announcement inviting right hon. and hon. Members to submit nominations for membership of health authorities will take; and when he plans to make the next one.

Mrs. Currie: The terms of office of about half the members of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals come to an end on 31 March 1988 and those of about half the members of the regional health authorities on 30 September 1988. Announcements inviting right hon. and hon. Members to submit nominations for these appointments will be made about a year in advance although the precise dates have not yet been decided. I have nothing to add on the form of the actual announcement, beyond my reply of 15 December at column *408*.

Brookwood Hospital

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions his Department has had with the South-West Thames regional health authority about the method and timing of the disposal of surplus land at Brookwood hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The South West Thames regional health authority is being advised on the sale of surplus land at Brookwood hospital by town planning experts and marketing agents. Exploratory discussions have been held with several prospective purchasers and offers are under consideration. There have been no discussions between the Department and the authority about the method and timing of this disposal.

Health Authorities (Computers)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to his replies to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, 8 December, column 71 and 15 December, column *421*, on what basis and by whom the tendering companies for the Wessex regional health authority computer contract were selected; what was the nature and extent of the advice sought from PACTEL on this matter; and if he will make a statement;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, 15 December, column *421*, if he will make it his policy to require regional health authorities to employ professional consultants when inviting tenders for computer-based technology contracts; and if he will make a statement;

(3) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*,

8 December, column *72*, if he will ask the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency to undertake the revision of his Department's guidance to regional health authorities on computer procurement; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chairman of Wessex regional health authority on the fulfilment of contractual obligations by Technicon since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Local Offices (Computers)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the computerisation of local social security offices to be completed; whether any local offices will have to be closed during the installation of such equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: The mainframe computer projects making up the Department's operational strategy are scheduled for implementation by mid 1992 with installation on a national basis beginning in late 1989. These projects include local office project (LOP) system which will replace the existing microcomputer support for supplementary benefit work already in use in the large majority of offices. Arrangements to install mainframe systems are still under consideration and will take careful account of the need to maintain effective service during the implementation period.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest estimates of the average wastage rates of staff in each grade in each social security region and each local social security office in the London north and south regions; and what were the comparable figures in 1979 and 1983.

Mr. Lyell: The following tables give voluntary resignation rates for 1979, 1983 and 1986 in each social security region for each of the main grades—executive officer/local officer I, clerical officer/local officer II, and clerical assistant. Voluntary resignation rates are not readily available in this detail for higher grades, but would be under 1 per cent. Rates for individual local offices in the two London regions are not available for 1979 and 1983. Neither are they readily available for 1986 and the cost of supplying them would be disproportionate. In any event, in view of the relatively small numbers involved combined with the erratic incidence of wastage, single year figures for any individual local office are of limited significance.

The rates quoted for 1979 and 1983 are based on historical data. The current rates given for 1986 are estimates based on voluntary resignations notified as part of a survey of the reasons staff give for leaving the Department.

Table I—1979
Department of Health and Social Security
Social Security Regional Organisation Voluntary Resignation Rates
1979, 1983, 1986

	Executive Officer/Local Officer I	*Clerical Officer/Local Officer II*	*Clerical Assistant*
Northern	3·2	10·2	14·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	5·2	11·1	11·8
East Midlands and East Anglia	4·8	19·5	18·3
London North	8·8	25·0	18·7
London South	7·5	20·4	20·6
London West	9·6	21·1	17·9
South Western	3·9	14·7	21·9
Wales	3·5	10·0	13·0
West Midlands	6·3	14·5	16·1
Manchester	4·8	13·8	18·8
Merseyside	5·6	14·1	14·5
Scotland	3·3	11·0	16·3
Total (Regional Organisation)	5·7	15·6	16·9

Table II—1983, 1986

	Executive Officer/Local Officer I		*Clerical Officer/Local Officer II*		*Clerical Assistant*	
	1983	*1986*	*1983*	*1986*	*1983*	*1986*
Scotland	2·0	0·7	4·5	2·1	5·9	3·7
North West	1·9	0·7	5·0	3·4	7·0	5·9
North East	2·0	0·9	5·7	3·5	7·0	5·8
Midlands	3·6	1·2	6·0	3·8	8·1	6·1
Wales and South West	2·5	0·8	6·7	2·9	10·0	5·1
London North	3·7	1·3	11·4	7·5	13·5	9·0
London South	3·5	1·9	9·6	8·4	12·0	10·0
Total (Regional Organisation)	2·7	1·1	6·5	4·7	8·3	6·6

Notes
1. Expressed as a percentage of staff in post in each grade in 1979, 1983 and 1986.
2. Between 1979 and 1983 the number of Social Security regions reduced from twelve to seven.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to increase the number of permanent staff at his Department's offices in Liverpool.

Mr. Lyell: There are no immediate plans to change the number of pemanent staff in the Department's offices in Liverpool. A review of staffing levels in the Department's local offices has just been completed. Complements of individual local offices, including those in Liverpool, will be revised in the light of the findings of this review and of the review which is examining all social security tasks to identify further scope for reducing workloads.

Benefits Handbooks

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he proposes to publish a revised edition of the supplementary benefits handbook embodying the changes since 1984;

(2) what plans he has to publish an income support handbook comparable to the current supplementary benefit handbook;

(3) if he has any plans to amend appendix 4 of the supplementary benefits handbook in respect of the welfare responsibilities of his staff.

Mr. Major: We have no plans to amend the supplementary benefit handbook before the supplementary benefit scheme is replaced by income support in April 1988. We are currently looking at the whole range of publicity and information produced by the Department in the context of the reforms in the Social Security Act 1986. The question of the publication of an income support handbook will be examined as part of this exercise.

Chief Adjudication Officer (Annual Report)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he received the annual report of the chief adjudication officer for 1985-86; and when he expects to publish it.

Mr. Lyell: We expect to receive the report shortly; publication will follow as soon as possible thereafter.

Children (Sexual Abuse)

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the incidence of child sex abuse in local authority homes; whether he plans any new initiatives in this regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information is not available centrally on the number of child sex abuse cases occurring in local authority homes.

A number of initiatives have been taken recently or are planned, which are intended to lead to improvements in the running of homes. New procedures were introduced last year to enable local authorities to check any criminal background of those who apply to work with children. Following a special departmental inspection of some 150 community homes in England in 1984 recommendations for the improvement of practice in them were issued to local authorities. Regulations expected to be introduced this year will require each community home to have a complaints procedure. A grant of £750,000 has been made to the Open University for a project to develop improving training for residential child care workers.

The Department has in hand a number of initiatives in relation to the handling of child sex abuse cases generally. These include the setting up of consultancy arrangements for agencies on training for professional staff, support of the development of such training and general guidance on inter-agency procedures for the handling of child abuse cases. This guidance which has been issued to local authorities in draft form contains a separate section on child sex abuse.

Nursery Provision

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the expenditure on all nursery provision for under fives in each of the last five years.

Mr. Newton: Local authority gross current expenditure on day nurseries in England for each of the last five years was as follows:

	£ million
1981-82	69·539
1982-83	76·394
1983-84	82·914
1984-85	87·944
1985-86	[1]88·038

[1] Provisional figure.

Information about expenditure on day nurseries in the private and voluntary sectors is not available centrally. The information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Hospitals

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many new hospitals have been built since 1979 and in which areas; what are the comparative figures for 1974-79; and how many out-patients and in-patients these can accommodate in each case.

Mrs. Currie: From information held centrally the following table compares the number of building schemes, each costing over £1 million, completed between 1974 and 1979, with those at the same cash price level completed since 1979. The in-patient beds provided in these schemes is also shown, but information is not readily available on the extent of out-patient facilities. The comparision cannot be revalued at current price levels because information is not held on schemes below £1 million, but it should be noted that since 1974 the building tender price index has risen from 101 to 224.

Region	*Schemes Completed since 1979*	*Beds Provided*	*Schemes completed between 1974-79*	*Beds Provided*
Northern	11	1,088	9	1,054
Yorkshire	9	1,148	11	820
Trent	22	3,481	17	2,653
East Anglian	14	2,160	7	—
North West Thames	19	1,180	9	793
North East Thames	10	1,154	10	873

Region	Schemes Completed since 1979	Beds Provided	Schemes completed between 1974-79	Beds Provided
South East Thames	13	828	6	1,243
South West Thames	15	730	10	677
Wessex	9	1,149	5	917
Oxford	9	608	10	484
South Western	11	979	6	14
West Midlands	21	1,502	11	224
Mersey	13	2,598	3	—
North Western	31	2,185	6	—
London Post Graduate Teaching Hospital	6	30	n/a	—
Total	213	20,820	120	9,752

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by region all hospitals whose future closure has been approved, the year when it is likely to take effect, and the number of beds that will be lost in each case; and if he will provide similar data regarding future cuts in beds in hospitals which are not being fully closed.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hanger and Vessa (Legal Actions)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the firms Hanger and Vessa are still pursuing their legal action against his Department; what is the basis of the allegations being made by the firms; what stage of the legal process has been reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: It is confirmed that Vessa Ltd. and J. E. Hanger & Co. Ltd. are still pursuing separate claims against the Department for declarations that the Department is legally obliged to continue to deal with them on the basis of certain expired "cost-plus" contracts. The Department rejects such contentions. In the case of Vessa the Department has served its defence and is in the process of seeking an expedited hearing for the action. In the case of Hanger the Department will be serving its defence early in the new year and then intends to apply also for an expedited hearing.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what percentage of total treatment costs is currently borne by the average patient treated in the general dental services;

(2) what percentage of current chargeable treatment costs is borne by the average patient in the general dental services.

Mrs. Currie: It is estimated that the average patient who pays charges pays about 55 per cent. of total treatment costs (including items such as check-ups which are free to everyone) and 65 per cent. of the cost of chargeable items of treatment.

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he has received any representations on changing to a proportional system for calculating patients' charges in the general dental services; whether he has any plans to introduce such charges; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has made any calculations of the necessary proportional charge for dental treatment which would be needed to produce the equivalent level of current revenue; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Charges for routine dental treatment are already based on a proportion of the costs. We have received representations in favour of a wholly proportional system from the British Dental Association, the General Dental Practitioners' Association and from individual dentists. The possibility of changing to such a system was raised in "Primary Health Care—an Agenda for Discussion" (Cmnd. 9771). Comments on proposals in the document are currently being considered.

If a system of wholly proportional charges had been introduced on 1 April 1986 a charge of 71 per cent. for courses of treatment commenced on or after that date would have been needed to raise the current level of revenue.

Diabetics

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure the issue of free needles, syringes and other equipment essential for self-treatment and any other medical treatment for diabetics; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Essential equipment is already available to diabetics free of charge, either on prescription by general medical practitioners or through the hospital service.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now provide blood sugar testing strips and disposable needles and syringes on the National Health Service for diabetics.

Mrs. Currie: Blood glucose testing strips and disposable syringes are already available free on the National Health Service through the hospital service if they are necessary for a patient's treatment.

Fluoride

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to monitor the effects upon health of adding fluoride in the public drinking water in areas which prior to the Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985 did not have it to one part per million.

Mrs. Currie: We monitor the safety and efficacy of new and existing water fluoridation schemes, both for their effects on dental health and other aspects of public health, and plan to continue to do so.

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he has given to chemists, hospitals, the retail trade and any other affected group about the sale or use of fluoride toothpaste in areas where the level of fluoride in the water has been raised to one part per million.

Mrs. Currie: None. The normal use of fluoride toothpaste in a fluoridated area is not considered to be in any way harmful to health.

Medical Students

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has had, and what discussions have taken place, concerning the admission of American students from Caribbean universities to study medicine in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Guardians Ad Litem

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has to how long it takes guardians ad litem to be appointed after child care proceedings have been initiated; and how long it takes their reports to be provided to the courts;

(2) whether any local authorities have received extra funding to appoint guardians ad litem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

National Health Service

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list all those district health authorities which have *(a)* ceased and *(b)* reduced expenditure on private contract services for each category of private contract work for the National Health Service in the last five years;

(2) what has been the percentage annual increase since 1972 in National Health Service expenditure deflated by movements in National Health Service pay and prices after taking account of (i) demographic change and the increased health service demands from the growing number of elderly people, and (ii) the higher annual cost of medical technology rising faster than inflation.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) in the last year for which information is available, how many persons in each district health authority area had to wait for more than a year for a hip replacement operation; and what percentage is each of these numbers of the total waiting for this operation in that area;

(2) how many persons are currently waiting for coronary bypass, bone marrow, cataract and hip replacement operations in each district health authority area; and what percentage in each case have been waiting for more than a year.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. Waiting list information is available centrally by the specialty of treatment and not by operation.

Homelessness

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he has given to the report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The Contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the Disabilities Study Unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Board and Lodging

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Service how many persons under the board and lodging rules have had benefit terminated after, respectively, two, four and eight weeks in each region of the country each month since the rules were introduced, and in total since then.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Irradiated Foods

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the outcome of his consideration of the report on safety and wholesomeness of irradiated foods by the Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods.

Mrs. Currie: The Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods considered comments received on its report at a December meeting. The committee is now preparing its advice which will be put to Health and Agriculture Ministers. Ministers will then be in a position to give full consideration to the report.

Meningitis

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will provide additional funds for research into meningitis and related bacterial infections; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will provide additional funding for the Public Health Laboratory Service to enable it to produce serum, and to conduct field and clinical trials in the United Kingdom at the earliest possible date in order to combat the present level of meningococcal meningitis.

(3) what account will be taken of existing toxicity trials and tests of Dr. Frasch's trials vaccine for meningococcal meningitis in any consideration given to the licensing of such vaccines in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what results have been obtained, and what progress is being made in combating meningococcal meningitis, as a result of Dr. Carl Frasch's visit in April 1986 to Porton Down;

(5) what co-operation is taking place between British and Norwegian authorities on research on parallel vaccine development for meningococcal meningitis; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department has already provided £57,000 to fund current research on meningitis in Gloucestershire, and is always prepared to consider other proposals. No proposal has been received relating to production of blood product serum to treat meningitis. I understand that the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) has already considered and discounted this possibility.

Research is continuing at the PHLS's centre for applied microbiological research (CAMR) Porton Down, to develop a vaccine against group B type 15 strains of meningococcal meningitis (which predominate in this country). CAMR is using the techniques pioneered by Dr. Carl Frasch and colleagues in developing a vaccine against group B type 2 strains of the disease, and trials already conducted on that vaccine will certainly be taken into account so far as they are relevant when any vaccine developed in this country reaches its own clinical trial stage. It has to be emphasised, however, that development of any new vaccine requires long and painstaking work in the laboratory at the outset.

Dr. Frasch attended a meeting on meningococcal vaccines at the PHLS last September, as did experts from Norway and Finland. Information was freely exchanged, and PHLS and the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control will continue to keep in touch with colleagues abroad.

Communicable Diseases (Notification)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the reviews of the present system of notification of communicable diseases.

Mrs. Currie: The system for notification and the diseases required to be notified are kept under continual review by the Department.

Heparin

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons received heparin in each of the last five years as a treatment for deep-vein thrombosis; what percentage for each year of those who died from pulmonary embolism were treated with heparin; what are the equivalent percentage figures for other European countries; and what evidence he has on the effects of the increased use of heparin treatment on deep-vein thrombosis and death from pulmonary embolism.

Mrs. Currie: Statistics are not maintained centrally on the treatment received by patients suffering from deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism either in this or any other European country. Heparin is one of a range of treatments available for these conditions, and it is for each patient's doctor to decide whether its use would be appropriate.

No information is immediately available about any evidence relating the increased use of heparin on deep vein thrombosis with death from pulmonary embolism, but further inquiries are being made. I shall write to the hon. Member when these are complete.

NHS (Capital Investment)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the level of capital investment in the National Health Service each year since 1960 at *(a)* current prices and *(b)* constant 1986 prices.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is as follows:

NHS Capital Expenditure—England

Year	*Cash terms (£m) (a)*	*At 1985-86 prices (£m) (b)*
1960-61	25	19[illegible]
1961-62	32	244
1962-63	34	245
1963-64	53	377
1964-65	61	415
1965-66	68	444
1966-67	75	472
1967-68	90	548
1968-69	95	549
1969-70	101	556
1970-71	119	608
1971-72	162	755
1972-73	205	887
1973-74	251	1,014
1974-75	254	860
1975-76	334	898
1976-77	364	865
1977-78	325	678
1978-79	373	703
1979-80	418	674
1980-81	568	773
1981-82	693	859
1982-83	718	830
1983-84	751	831
1984-85	844	895
1985-86	922	922

Notes:
1. The figures for 1970-71 and earlier years are income and expenditure based. For 1971-72 and subsequent years the figures are cash based.
2. Comparisons over such a long period cannot be made with precision because of changes in the structure of the NHS and in the method of calculating GDP.
3. The figures in column (b) have been revalued to 1985-86 levels using the GDP deflator.

Hospital Doctors

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current shortage, in numbers and percentage terms, of hospital doctors in each specialty by region.

Mr. Newton: Information on the number of vacant posts is not held centrally for all hospital grades. I am aware of reports of difficulties in filling senior house officer posts in certain specialties. The underlying cause appears to be problems in the hospital medical staffing structure, which our proposals in "Achieving a Balance" are intended to address.

Private Residential Care

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what basis payments in respect of elderly people in private residential care are made to landlords after a person's death.

Mr. Lyell: Benefit entitlement ceases at death. When a person dies before obtaining payment of benefit due for the period prior to death, that benefit may on application

be paid or distributed to, or amongst, persons over the age of 16 claiming as personal representatives, legatees, next of kin or creditors of the deceased. It is possible for a proprietor of a residential care home to claim as a creditor where there were unmet accommodation charges at the time of death.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the cancer units for treatment of (i) in-patients and (ii) out-patients that have closed since 1979, giving the number of beds involved in each case and the date of closure; and if he will list those cancer units whose closure is now being sought or has been approved but not yet implemented.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hospitals (Cross Infection Rate)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all information available to him about the cross-infection rate in hospitals over the last seven years.

Mrs. Currie: Estimates of cross infection rates in hospitals as requested are not available.

NHS (Property Sales)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all surplus National Health Service property sold since 1979 in excess of £50,000, the price obtained and the date of sale.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate the average additional component payable each year since 1978 on top of the basic retirement pension for persons who retired each year since then on average earnings; and what he estimates the additional component will be each year from now until 1998 if prices rise 3 per cent. per year and average earnings rise 5 per cent. per year.

Mr. Major: The information requested is shown in the table. The amounts apply to a person in full-time employment who has consistently earned at the level of average male earnings since 1978, who is not contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, and who retires on 6 April in each year. The amounts are weekly and rounded to the nearest 5p.

Year	*Amount of additional component* £
1978	nil
1979	0·95
1980	2·20
1981	3·95
1982	6·20
1983	8·45
1984	10·80
1985	13·55
1986	16·25
1987	20·05
1988	23·85
1989	27·50
1990	31·40
1991	35·75
1992	40·50
1993	45·45
1994	51·05
1995	56·90
1996	63·50
1997	70·35
1998	78·05

AIDS

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will review the disposal of National Health Service property in the light of future needs resulting from the likely spread of AIDS.

Mrs. Currie: Health authorities are responsible for keeping their estates under regular review and disposing of any properties for which there is no future requirement. In discharging this responsibility, we expect authorities to take into account any plans for the development of services for those suffering from AIDS.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to compensate those haemophiliacs who have been infected with AIDS by Factor VIII brought from the United States of America.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether anti-viral lubricant agents will be made freely available for use in conjunction with condoms as an added measure to prevent the spread of the AIDS virus;

(2) whether in the Government's advertising campaign to promote safer sex and the prevention of the spread of AIDS virus he will be advising people to use the anti-viral lubricant agents in conjunction with condoms.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 December 1986, c *294*]: Current advice is that if a lubricant is used with a condom it is important that it should not weaken the condom material, as can happen with some oil-based gels. It is theoretically possible that anti-viral agents added to lubricants might provide additional protection against HIV (the AIDS virus). Products promoted as anti-viral lubricants require licences under the Medicines Act 1968 and have to be assessed for quality, safety and efficacy: this assessment would also involve consideration of interaction with barrier contraceptives. At present, there are no product licences in force for any anti-viral lubricant for use in conjuction with condoms as a prophylactic against HIV infection.

Social Workers (Deaths)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many social workers were killed on duty in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Newton: Information about attacks on social workers in not collected centrally.

Waiting List Admissions

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those health authorities which in *(a)* 1984-85, *(b)* 1985-86 and *(c)* 1986-87 had at any time to cease or reduce temporarily waiting list admissions in order to cope with emergencies.

Mr. Newton: This information is not collected centrally. There may be limited periods when, for short term reasons, some authorities are unable to perform elective surgery. The urgency with which a particular patient is treated is a matter for the clinical decision of the consultant concerned.

Bacterial Infection (Research)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will be prepared to fund a research project at Edinburgh university department of bacteriology which proposes to investigate a potentially significant area of bacterial infection relating to blood group Antigen non-secretors.

Mr. John MacKay: I have been asked to reply.

Funding towards the cost of the research project to which the hon. Member refers, has been provided by the Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust, which is a non-departmental public body. The trust has undertaken to review the progress of the project after one year but the researchers may, if they so wish, apply for further funding either to the trust, or the Medical Research Council.

Patient Care

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the private institutions providing in-patient and out-patient treatment to National Health Service patients and contractual arrangements with health authorities during 1985.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 24 November 1986, c.*129-130*]: The requested information is given in the table.

Private institutions providing in-patient and out-patient treatment to NHS patients under contractual arrangements with health authorities during 1985.

Northern Regional Health Authority
Cumberland and Westmorland Convalescent Home, Carlisle, Cumbria
Durranhill House, Carlisle, Cumbria
Holehird Lake District Cheshire Home, Windermere, Cumbria
Lemmington Hall, Alnwick, Northumberland
Nazareth House, Middlesborough, Cleveland
St. Camillus Hospital, Hexham, Northumberland
St. Cuthbert's Hospital, Darlington, County Durham

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Donsithorpe Hall, Leeds LS17
May Lodge Childrens Home, Scarborough, North Yorkshire
Retreat, The, York YO1
St. John of God Hospital, Richmond, North Yorkshire
St. Joseph's Convalescent Home, Leeds LS18
Sue Ryder Home, Keighley, Yorkshire
Victoria Home for Invalid Ladies, Leeds LS6

Trent Regional Health Authority
Broomgrove Trust Nursing Home, Sheffield S10
Caenby Nursing Home, Lincoln LN5
Danum Lodge Nursing Home, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
Langham House Nursing Home, Rutland, Leicestershire
Newlands House Cheshire Home, Burton on Trent, Staffordshire
North Nottinghamshire Cheshire Home, Retford, Nottinghamshire
Ranmoor Grange Nursing Home, Sheffield S10
St. Luke's Nursing Home, Sheffield S11

East Anglian Regional Health Authority
All Hallows Hospital, Bungay, Suffolk
North Sea Medical Centre, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk
Papworth Village Settlement, Everard, Cambridgeshire
RAF Hospital, Ely, Cambridgeshire
St. Edmund's Nursing Home, Ipswich, Suffolk
St. Joseph's Home, Sudbury, Suffolk

North West Thames Regional Health Authority
British Pregnancy Advisory Service, London SW1H
Hertfordshire Cheshire Home, Hitchin, Hertfordshire
Kneesworth House Psychiatric Hospital, Royston, Hertfordshire
Leonard Cheshire Home, Ampthill, Bedfordshire
Nazareth House, Brookgreen, London W6
Nazareth House, Finchley, London N2
Nazareth House, Isleworth, Middlesex
Royal Star and Garter Home, Richmond, Surrey
Silver Birches, Elizabeth Fitzroy House, Richmond, Surrey
St. Elizabeth's Home, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire
St. Raphael's Centre, London EN6
St. Vincent's Orthopaedic Hospital, Pinner, Middlesex

North East Thames Regional Health Authority
Arbours Association Crisis Centre, London N8
Cadlington House, London EC14
Cedars and Sandy Point Nursing Homes, Frinton on Sea, Essex
Dominican Convalescent Home, Kelvedon, Essex
Goldsmith Nursing Home, London N6
Hamilton Lodge, Colchester, Essex
Hill Homes, London N6
Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth, London NW8
Jewish Home and Hospital, London N15
Lulworth Court, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex
Marie Stopes Nursing Home, London W2
Marillac Hospital, Brentwood, Essex
Nightingale BUPA Hospital, The, London NW1
Pregnancy and Gynaecological Advisory Service, London NW1
Pregnancy Advisory Service, London W1P
Rustington Convalescent Home, London EC2N
St. Joseph's Hospice, London E8
St. Joseph's Nursing Home, Chelmsford, Essex
St. Joseph's Nursing Home, London N9
St. Osyth Priory Convalescent Home, Clacton on Sea, Essex

South East Thames Regional Health Authority
Amberclair Residential Home, Hastings, East Sussex
Brompton Home, The, Gillingham, Kent
Cabrini House, London SE23
Catherine House Convalescent Home, St. Leonards on Sea, East Sussex
Catisfield House, Hove, Sussex
Chaseley Nursing Home, Eastbourne, East Sussex
Chelwood Corner Nursing Home Ltd, Uckfield, East Sussex
Derwent House Chislehurst, Kent
Edith Priday Red Cross Home, London SE3
Fallowfield, Chislehurst, Surrey
Hawkhurst Castle, Tunbridge Wells, Kent
Hazelville Nursing Home, Hove, East Sussex
Horder Centre for Arthritics, Crowborough, East Sussex
Hurst, The, Hastings, East Sussex
Mote House Cheshire Home, Maidstone, Kent
Nightingale Nursing Home, Newick, East Sussex
Philbeach, Hythe, Kent
Raleigh Nursing Home, London SW2
Ranyard Memorial Nursing Home, London SE13
Rectory House Nursing Home, Lancing, West Sussex
Springfield House Nursing Home, Crawley, West Sussex
St. Cecilia's Cheshire Home, Bromley, Kent
St. Christopher's Hospice, London SE26

St. George's Retreat, Burgess Hill, West Sussex
St. Mary's Convent, Portslade Brighton, East Sussex
Sussex House, St. Leonards on Sea, East Sussex
Sydney House, Lydd, Kent
Ticehurst House Hospital, Wadhurst, East Sussex
Wadeville, Belvedere, Kent
Westminster Convalescent Home, Hastings, East Sussex
Wilbury Lodge, Hove, East Sussex

South West Thames Regional Health Authority
Ashley Lodge, Ashley, Hampshire
Bermondsey and Brook Lane Medical Mission, Bognor Regis, Sussex
Camelot Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Cleveland Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Donec House, Hindhead, Hampshire
East Ridge Nursing Home, Bolney, West Sussex
Grange, The, Hindhead, Surrey
Heaton House Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Holy Cross Hospital, Haslemere, Surrey
Homelands Nursing Home, Cowfold, West Sussex
Hurst Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Hydon Hill Cheshire Home, Godalming, Surrey
King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst, West Sussex
Kylemore Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Maderia Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Marie Carlisle House, Woking, Surrey
Maryfield House, Roehampton, London SW15
Melbreck Children's Home, Waverley, Surrey
Myrtles Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Offington Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Ravenswood Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables, London SW15
Sandena Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Seacroft Nursing Home, Littlehampton, West Sussex
South View Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
St. Mary's Convent, London SW15
St. Michael's Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
St. Peter's Convent, Woking, Surrey
St. Teresa's Hospital, London SW20
Sutton Lodge Nursing Home, Worthing, West Sussex
Tadworth Court Children's Hospital, Tadworth, Surrey
Trinity Hospice, London SW4
Unsted Park Nursing Home, Godalming, Surrey
Victoria House, Leatherhead, Surrey
Whiteley Hosptial, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey

Wessex Regional Health Authority
Allendale Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
Anglesey Lodge, Gosport, Hampshire
Belmont Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Birchy Hill Nursing Home, Lymington, Hampshire
Bordean House, Petersfield, Hampshire
Branksome Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
Brooklyn Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Cadlington House School, Havant, Hampshire
Cromer Lodge Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Dunwood Manor Nursing Home, Romsey, Hampshire
Flowerdown Nursing Home, Winchester, Hampshire
Frasergate Ltd, Westbury House, West Meon, Hampshire
Gables Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Greathouse Cheshire Homes, Chippenham, Wiltshire
Highcliffe Nursing Home, Christchurch, Dorset
Hill House Rest Home, Lyndhurst, Hampshire
Hillsdon Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
James Burns House, Bournemouth, Dorset
Kenton House Nursing Home, Bordon, Hampshire
Le Court, Liss, Hampshire
Leabury Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Marden Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
Nazareth House, Southampton
Newlands Lodge Nursing Home, Southsea, Hampshire
Northbrook Nursing Home, Devizes, Wiltshire
Ormonde Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
Poolmead Home for Deaf Women, Bath, Avon
Railway Convalescent Home, Portsmouth PO1
Sandringham House Nursing Home, Poole, Dorset
Shelly Park Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Silverways Nursing Home, Christchurch, Dorset
Spyway Adolescent and Young People Unit, Swanage, Dorset
St. Anne's Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
St. Catherine's Nursing Home, Bath, Avon
St. Joseph's Convalescent Home, Bournemouth, Dorset

Oxford Regional Health Authority
Ascot Nursing Home, Ascot, Berkshire
Byron House Nursing Home, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
Chalfont Centre for Epilepsy, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire
Chiltern Cheshire Home, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire
Kemsley Unit, St. Andrews Hospital, Northampton NN1
Leonard Cheshire Family Care Scheme, The, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire
Nazareth House, Oxford OX4
Oxfordshire Cheshire Home, Banbury, Oxfordshire
Peppard House, Reading, Berkshire
Ravenswood, Crowthorne, Berkshire
St. Andrew's Hospital, Northampton NN1

South Western Regional Health Authority
Ash Priors Nursing Home, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
Astley Nursing Home, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
Belmont Nursing Home, Clevedon, Avon
Blackdown Nursing Home, Tavistock, Devon
Bonaer Nursing Home, Hayle, Cornwall
Bradley Court Nursing Home, Mitcheldean, Gloucestershire
Frampton Nursing Home, Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire
Homefield House, Hayle, Cornwall
Moore and Dunbar, Stroud, Gloucestershire
Mount Stuart Hospital, Torquay, Devon
North Hill Nursing Home, St. Austell, Cornwall
Old Roselyon Manor, Par, Cornwall
Pearn Convalescent Home, Plymouth, Devon
Rowcroft Hospice, Torquay, Devon
Salmonsbury House, Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire
St. Michael's Hospital, Hayle, Cornwall
St. Paul's Nursing Home, Gloucester
St. Peter's Convent, Plymouth, Devon
St. Teresa's Cheshire Home, Penzance, Cornwall
Tidcombe Hall Nursing Home, Tiverton, Devon
Woodville Rest Home, Gloucester

West Midlands Regional Health Authority
British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Birmingham B2
Compton Hall Macmillan Home, Wolverhampton
Derwen Treatment and Rehab. Centre, Oswestry, Shropshire
Douglas Macmillan Home, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire
Myton Hamlet Hospice, Warwick CV34
Park Attwood Therapeutic Centre, Bewdley, Worcestershire
Royal Midlands Counties Home for Disabled, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire
Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire
St. Giles Hospice, Lichfield, Staffordshire
St. Mary's Hospice, Birmingham B29
St. Michael's Hospice, Bartestree, Hereford
Sunfield Children's Homes Ltd, Stourbridge, West Midlands
Warwickshire Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham
Wharf Street Hostel, Warwick

Mersey Regional Health Authority
Beach Lawn Nursing Home, Waterloo, Merseyside
Blundellsands Nursing Home, Liverpool L23
British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Liverpool L1
Merseyside Nursing Home, Liverpool L17
St. Joseph's Children's Hospital, Liverpool L37
St. Martin's Hospice, Liverpool
St. Vincent's Home, Liverpool L13
Stapely Hospital, Liverpool L18
Sunny Bank Nursing Home, Liverpool L25
Thingwall Hall Residential Training Centre, Liverpool L14

North Western Regional Health Authority

Alexian Brothers Nursing Home, Manchester M10
Cheadle Royal Hospital, Cheadle, Cheshire
Fylde Coast Hospital, Blackpool, Lancashire
Gillibrand Hall, Chorley, Lancashire
Lisieux Hall, Chorley, Lancashire
Philip Godlee Lodge, Manchester M20
St. Ann's Hospice, Cheadle, Cheshire
St. Ann's Hospice, Worsley, Manchester
St. John of God Hospital, Carnforth, Lancashire
St. John's Hospice, Lancaster, Lancashire
St. Joseph's Hospital, Preston, Lancashire
Wigan Hospice, Wigan, Lancashire
Heathlands, Manchester M25

Wales
Care Concern (Well St), Corwen, Clwyd
Nazareth House, Cardiff CF1

Statistics

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in respect of the statistics kept and published by his Department, he will publish in the *Official Report* any changes since 1979 in *(a)* the statistical series which are published, including those which have been introduced and those which have been dropped, *(b)* the basis on which any elements in the statistics are estimated, calculated or presented, *(c)* the periods over which, and the dates on which the series are collected or published and *(d)* any other respects in the ways in which the statistics are collected, recorded, presented, evaluated, or published; and if he will explain the reasons for any such changes.

Mr. Fowler [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1986, c. *698*]: Changes in statistical series are made when the Government's requirements for statistical information alter and in response to changes in the administrative systems on which some series are based. Such changes are documented in the Department's main statistical publications, in introductions, appendices and the footnotes to tables. The principal changes in statistics since 1979 have been:

Health and Personal Social Services

"Health and Personal Social Service Statistics for England"

As from 1985, the publication "Health and Personal Social Service Statistics for England" is published on a regular annual basis. A number of additional analyses of medical and dental staff by region are now included.

Certain statistical returns on health and personal social services ceased as a result of the report of the Departmental study team in the Rayner review of Government statistical services. Fuller information is given in the following table.

Item	*Recommendation Number*[1]	*Comments*
NHS non-medical manpower		
Census returns of students in the professions supplementary to medicine	15	
The distinction between community health and school health nurses, in the annual returns of primary health care nursing and midwifery staff (SBH2(c))	16	
The annual returns of student radiographers by training school (SBH153); the annual returns of teaching staff and students at schools of physiotherapy (SBH154); the annual return of nurses receiving the geriatric lead payment (SBH155), and the annual regional summary census of nursing and midwifery staff (SBH210)	17	
NHS medical and dental manpower		
The returns on 'joiners and leavers' — both annual (SBH55) and monthly (SBH57)	23	
NHS hospital and community health services		
Mid-year hospital activity return (SBH1)	33	More detailed information continues to be collected on an annual basis on Form SH3
Quarterly return of sexually transmitted diseases (SBH60)	34	Now an annual return
Census of government owned road vehicles (SBH3)	36	The census was for Department of Transport
Part 2 of return on private patients in NHS hospitals by specialty and admitting consultants (SBH211)	38	Part 1 of return continues unchanged. (Total beds, discharges, attendances)
Part of return on school and child guidance clinics dealing with facilities (20M)	40	Whole return discontinued
Personal social services		
Return SSDA103 and parts of return SSDA107 giving (i) statistics on mentally handicapped and mentally ill persons *(a)* admitted to local authority homes and hostels during the year; *(b)* resident in voluntary and private homes and hostels during year (ii) detailed information on residential places available for mentally handicapped and mentally ill persons	59	
Return on homes and hostels for drug addicts and alcoholics (SSDA111)	60	
Part of return SSDA512 giving statistics on: (i) days adult training centres and day centres normally open; (ii) Mentally handicapped persons regularly attending adult training centres and detailed information on places available	61	
Part of return on local authority day nurseries opened or closed during the year (SSDA503)	62	
Part of return giving detailed statistics on the meals services provided for the elderly and/or physically handicapped by various voluntary organisations and the local authority (SSDA302)	63	
Returns on households visited by home helps (SSDA303)	64	
Part of return on persons removed from partially sighted register (SSDA902)	66	Information on registered handicapped persons is now collected triennially rather than annually

Item	Recommendation Number[1]	Comments
Parts of returns SSDA104 and SSDA108 giving (i) detailed information about places, staffing and financial support of children in community homes with education on premises; (ii) information on community homes other than those with education on premises or assessment centres	68	
Part of returns on adoption (SSDA907) and adoption orders (SSDA907B)	70	SSDA907 has now been discontinued in favour of a new return which is completed in the course of the adoption process and analysed by OPCS
Return on financial assistance to children towards expenses of maintenance, education and training (SSDA905)	71	

[1] The numbers are those of recommendations in the Review of Government Statistical Services—report of the DHSS study team.

A series of statistical bulletins was issued as from 1984 mainly related to hospital statistics. Full information was given in the reply from my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on 10 July at columns *273-276*.

Health Service

Certain booklets containing *manpower statistics* have been discontinued, for example, those relating to nursing and midwifery staff were last published in respect of the 1981 census, those to other staff groups in respect of the census for the previous year. These statistics are, however, freely available in the Library and an 'ad-hoc' service provides information on demand in the most suitable form for the user.

Performance Indicators for health authorities were first published in book form in 1983. Since then the number of indicators has been increased and they are now available on floppy disk. Copies are held in the Library, and print-outs can be obtained. Further information on the basis on which this information is collected was given in the reply from my hon. Friend the Minister for Health to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 21 October 1986 at columns *867-868*.

Social Security

Social Security Statistics

The changes made in this publication are mainly due to changes in legislation, the introduction or abolition of benefits, or as a result of general improvements to meet the needs of customers. For example:

—New tables were produced on *retirement pension* and widow's benefit following the introduction of SERPS.

—Tables on *prices* and *earnings* were amended as a result of the abolition of earnings related supplement.

—Summary tables on *claims* were added as a result of customer requests to summarise trends in claims and recipients of various benefits.

—New tables were introduced following the operation of the *housing benefit* scheme in April 1983.

Annual Statistical Enquiry (Supplementary Benefit)

Before 1979 only summary figures were published. After 1979 and commencing with the figures from the 1982 enquiry a full tabulated set of results has been placed in the Library. Starting with the results from the 1983 enquiry this volume has also been available to the general public. Changes in individual series have reflected changes in the regulations governing benefit entitlement.

Low Income Family Statistics

Before 1979 this series appeared annually but since 1979 the tables have been published biennially. When the 1983 figures were released in July 1986, it was also announced that a technical review of the methods and assumptions underlying the construction of this series was taking place and its findings would be incorporated in future editions of the tables.

Tax Benefit Tables

These tables have usually been published twice a year, reflecting changes to tax rates in April and benefit upratings in November. With the alignment of these two processes in April 1987 the tables will be released once a year. From the April 1985 edition the range of illustrative family types was extended to include small families with older children.

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Considerably more information was made available on—

Fertility statistics (including a new series of conception statistics).

Births and deaths analysed by area (including analyses by wards from 1981).

Decennial Supplement on Occupational Mortality (but less commentary).

Hospital In-Patients Enquiry.

General Practice Morbidity Statistics.

1981 Census (particularly for small areas).

Other changes include—

Ethnic minority population estimates: new series were introduced from 1981.

Population projections for the counties of the United Kingdom: biennial frequency was adopted instead of annual from 1979 (following Rayner Review) but more details were made available.

Rubella associated terminations of pregnancy: (annual series were introduced from 1974).

Congenital Malformation: new series were introduced from 1971.

Deaths related to sport: annual series were introduced from 1982.

Voters in local government elections: the annual series was dropped from 1980 (following Rayner Review).

Low-income Families

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will retabulate the data on low-income families given in the answer of 25 July on a male-female basis according to the following age groups: under pension age, less than 20, 20 to 29, 30 to 44 and 45 plus years and over pension age, 60 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 79 and 80 plus years.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 8 December 1986, c. *70*]: The readily available information is shown in the following table:

Low-income families 1983—Number of families[1] appearing in the tables by sex and age of head

(Thousands)

	Receiving supplementary benefit or housing benefit supplement	*Not receiving supplementary benefit or housing benefit supplement but with relative net resources less than—*				*Total Heads (Great Britain)*
		100	*110*	*120*	*140*	
Under pension age						
Males, aged						
less than 20		180	230	250	340	1,530
20-29		140	260	340	550	3,940
30-44		140	220	320	610	5,480
45-64		200	270	320	550	5,630
Females, aged						
less than 20		160	220	220	320	1,200
20-29		100	130	150	190	1,560
30-44		30	40	50	130	880
45-60		70	100	140	240	1,070
Total	2,040	1,010	1,470	1,790	2,930	21,290
Over pension age						
Males, aged						
65-69		100	210	290	460	1,110
70-79		200	380	540	740	1,650
80 or over		40	70	90	130	380
Females, aged						
60-64		90	110	150	200	520
65-69		70	130	190	270	600
70-79		250	450	600	710	1,540
80 or over		110	140	220	310	820
Total	1,600	870	1,490	2,080	2,820	6,610

Note:
[1] A family is defined in terms of the assessment unit for supplementary benefit, ie a single person or married couple with their dependent children, if any. (Dependent children are those aged less than 16 or 16-19 and still in full-time non-advanced education.)

Birth Statistics

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for the years 1982 to 1985 the estimated percentages of women delivered in *(a)* England and *(b)* England and Wales, whose deliveries were (i) spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breach spontaneous, (ii) instrumental (forceps, vacuum and breach extraction), (iii) by caesarean section and (iv) other and unspecified means.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 9 December 1986, c. *126*]: The information is given in the table. Data for 1985 are not yet available.

Estimated percentages of women delivering by specified modes of delivery (a) England (b) England and Wales—1982 to 1984

Mode of delivery	*Percentage of all deliveries*					
	(a) England			*(b) England and Wales*		
	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
(i) Spontaneous including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous	76·6	76·5	78·0	78·0	78·5	78·7
'Spontaneous' after induction	1·3	1·9	0·6			
(ii) Instrumental—forceps, vacuum and breech extraction	11·9	11·5	11·2	11·8	11·3	11·0
(iii) Caesarean section	10·1	10·1	10·1	10·1	10·1	10·2
(iv) Other and unspecified	0·04	0·1	0·1	[1]0·04	[1]0·1	[1]0·1

[1] Deliveries are not coded to this category in Wales.
Source: England Maternity HIPE
Wales HAA
Note: Percentages may not add to exactly 100 because of rounding

Statistical Information

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the changes that have been made since 1979 in his Department in the presentation of statistical information; and what further changes are now planned.

Mr. Fowler [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1986, c. 215]: For past changes in the presentation of statistical information I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) today.

All statistics and the form in which they are presented are kept under continuous review and further planned changes included those associated with the following:

—the implementation of the recommendations of the steering group on health services information, for example the replacement of the hospital in-patients enquiry by a new source;

—the on-going reviews of personal social service statistics collected from the local authorities;

—other reviews; eg, the technical review of low income statistics;

—legislative changes relating to benefits following the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986;

—the publication of more material in Statistical Bulletins;

—proposal for special volumes by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys giving a long-run of historial data for births, marriage and divorce, and mortality.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 January 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Maintenance

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to provide funds for university maintenance.

Mr. Walden: In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 6 November 1986, at columns 487-96, my right hon. Friend announced that the Government would increase university recurrent grant by 7·2 per cent. between the financial years 1986-87 and 1987-88. Within the increased funding my right hon. Friend said that he expected the University Grants Committee to make provision for a number of particular improvements, including essential repairs and maintenance of plant and buildings.

TRANSPORT

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether, further to his announcement of proposals for the 1987-88 transport supplementary grant settlement on 17 December, he is now in a position to make clear his intentions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I am pleased to announce that I intend to accept £360 million of expenditure for transport supplementary grant in 1987-88 at a flat rate of 50 per cent. This £180 million of grant is an increase of almost 10 per cent. over 1986-87. It means that I can both maintain my commitment to support schemes accepted in previous settlements and accept a large number of new schemes.

Most of the committed schemes are already under construction or starting in 1986-87. With TSG support to their road programmes, local authorities have already reported for 1985-86 completion of 60 major schemes—those costing £1 million or more—with a total value of £200 million and a start of works on 68 schemes costing £360 million. During 1986-87 they plan to complete a further 49 major schemes costing £150 million and start 76 costing £350 million.

I also intend to accept 70 new schemes costing £350 million, including important improvements such as the Harrogate-Knaresborough bypass; a further section of the Blackwater Valley route; Regent Road, Salford; Merton relief road and the Coventry Road juction of the middle ring road in Birmingham.

The programmes on roads of more than local importance accepted for TSG are important because they save lives, reduce congestion and relieve communities from the effects of through traffic. They help the national economy by aiding the efficient flow of goods, people and services. TSG reflects the national taxpayer's interest in helping local authorities to improve roads carrying heavier longer distance traffic such as those on the country's primary route network or major urban roads which must be adequate in quality and capacity to complement our trunk roads and motorways. The Department's commitment to maintain support in succeeding years providing progress is satisfactory gives authorities the confidence to plan and finance major schemes where they are needed.

European Road Safety Year is over, but I want road safety to remain high on the agenda. Many smaller schemes on these heavily trafficked roads often produce very significant accident savings amongst other benefits. Timely investment in smaller schemes may also avoid the need for more substantial works at a later date, giving further benefits to the community. To encourage this worthwhile work, I have taken into account some £55 million of expenditure on minor works for grant in 1987-88, £14 million more than 1986-87.

Settle-Carlisle Railway Line

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, before reaching a decision about the future of the Settle to Carlisle line, he will publish the financial case for closure submitted to him by British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have now written to the hon. Member with a copy of the financial information published by the board, copies of which have been placed in the Library today.

British Airways

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement about the British Airways offer for sale.

Mr. Moore: A pathfinder prospectus was published on 8 January. Copies are available in the Library and in the Vote Office.

Preliminary registration statements are being filed in the United States, Canada and Japan. I intend to offer the shares for sale on Thursday 27 January and the last date for receipt of applications will be Friday 6 February.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Talks (Tokyo)

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the outcome of his talks with the Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications during his visit to Tokyo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: In my talks in Tokyo I emphasied Her Majesty's Government's full support for the bid by Cable and Wireless and the IDC consortium to establish a second Japanese international telecommunications carrier alongside KDD. I pressed for the merits of the proposals from the various consortia to be fully assessed and urged against premature decisions being taken on an issue very important to the demonstration of Japanese commitment to international trade and industrial collaboration. These points have since been confirmed in a note.

Patent Office

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans for the Patent Office in the legislative programme for 1986-87; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: As announced in the White Paper "Intellectual Property and Innovation" (Cmnd. 9712) the Government propose to hive off the Patent Office and establish it as a non-departmental non-Crown public body. Legislation to implement this and other proposals of the White Paper will be introduced when the parliamentary timetable permits.

Lloyd's (Committee of Inquiry)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report of the Committee of Inquiry into regulatory arrangements at Lloyd's will be published.

Mr. Butcher: Arrangements for publication of the committee's report are in hand. I am expecting that it will be possible for it to be published on Thursday 22 January.

Sub-Postmasters' Compensation Fund

Sir Philip Holland asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to amend the conditions of the sub-postmasters' compensation fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: I met the general secretary and other representatives of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters today to discuss particularly the terms of the Government's special £2 million compensation fund for sub-postmasters. The fund was established, following an announcement in the House on 13 May 1983 by the then Secretary of State for Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), to help smaller sub-post offices that were adversely affected by changes in the arrangements for the payment of social security benefits. The fund was due to be closed on 30 April this year.

In March last year, the general secretary wrote to me suggesting that the conditions of the fund, particularly the closing date, might be changed. After consulting the Post Office, I have decided that in recognition of the exceptional circumstances caused by industrial action within the DHSS in 1984-85, which considerably distorted sub-postmasters' work levels for about a year, the fund should be extended by one year to 30 April 1988. I have told the federation that the new expiry date must be regarded as final and that we could not entertain the possibility of a further extension.

The opportunity has also been taken to update the guidelines, which explain the background to the fund and qualification criteria, to reflect recent changes in sub-postmasters' conditions of employment. I am making arrangements for copies of the revised guidelines to be placed in the Library and to be available from my Department.

Textiles

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the adoption of Community regulations implementing the Community's 26th bi-lateral agreement with textile supplying countries and introducing quota restrictions on imports from Taiwan.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 2 December 1986 the House debated a decision (document 9809/86) relating to the Community's signature of the protocol of the multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) and a decision (document 10720/86) on the provisional application of the Community's bilateral textile agreements with certain third countries from 1 January 1987.

The Commission subsequently submitted to the Council its proposals for three regulations, the first setting out the detailed provisions governing the implementation of the above agreements under the MFA with certain third countries, the second with Yugoslavia and the third its proposed regulation concerning quotas on imports from Taiwan. The House of Commons Select Committee on European Legislation considered these three proposed regulations on 17 December 1986 and recommended them for further consideration by the House. I regret it was not possible to arrange the debate before the House rose on 19 December: But since the House had already debated the policy implications of the MFA on 2 December, and since the maintenance of a scrutiny reserve would have prevented implementation of the measures on 1 January 1987, thereby damaging United Kingdom industry, I was satisfied that, in accordance with the terms of the resolution of the House of 30 October 1980, there were special reasons why adoption should not be delayed until after the debate recommended by the Scrutiny Committee. I therefore agreed to the adoption of the three regulations on 22 December 1986. A debate on the regulations will be arranged as soon as possible.

Unipart and Leyland Bus

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress on the privatisation of Unipart and Leyland Bus.

Mr. Giles Shaw: On 24 July 1986, my right hon. Friend announced that agreement in principle had been reached on the sale of Unipart and, separately, Leyland Bus to management-led consortia. I am pleased to announce that the contractual arrangements relating to both sales have now been completed.

Unipart has been acquired by UGC Ltd, a consortium of its management and employees and a group of institutional investors. Employees of Unipart are being given the opportunity to subscribe for a 12 per cent. interest in UGC whilst the Unipart managers' share in the company may rise from an initial 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. if performance targets are met.

On Leyland Bus, it was contemplated in July that the management consortium would purchase Leyland Bus and 33 per cent. of Leyland Parts for a sum of £11·7 million. Following detailed negotiations, it has now been determined that the management consortium will purchase Leyland Bus for a sum of £4 million, subject to audit. Leyland Parts will, however, remain within Leyland Vehicles Ltd, continuing to market bus parts on behalf of the privatised bus company. Appropriate contractual arrangements have been negotiated between the parties. Employees are to be given an opportunity to own shares in the business on a basis to be determined.

The Government hope that the new private sector companies will take advantage of these opportunities to develop viable and successful enterprises.

ENVIRONMENT

Private Housing

Mr. Bendall asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take any further steps to improve the prospects for the private rented sector, especially in London.

Mr. John Patten: I have today laid before the House two orders under the Housing Act 1980. The first of these repeals the provisions of the Rent Act 1977 and the rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 which require any increase in a fair rent for a regulated tenancy set by a rent officer or a rent assessment committee to be phased over two years. Because inflation has fallen to such a low level, there is no longer any justification for delaying full payment of any rent increase when awarded. This should improve marginally the return available to private landlords from fair rents. At the same time, tenants who are eligible for housing benefit will of course receive benefit at once on any higher rent.

The second order amends the Housing Act 1980 so as to remove the requirement on a landlord in the Greater London area who is letting a property under shorthold to register a fair rent for the property. This requirement was abolished in 1981 for properties outside the Greater London area. It will still be open to either landlord or tenant for a property let on shorthold in the Greater London area to apply for a fair rent to be registered. I hope that this will encourage owners keeping property empty in London to now let it, secure in the knowledge that they will be able to obtain vacant possession.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the achievements and publications since 11 June 1984 of the structural integrity division of the Building Research Establishment; and what is its current programme of work.

Mr. John Patten: Since 11 June 1984 the structural integrity division of the Building Research Establishment has been engaged mainly on continuing investigations, but with the addition of a major new programme of investigations of large panel system dwellings in collaboration with other divisions throughout the establishment. There have been 43 publications, of which 13 were concerned with system built dwellings, 17 with the performance and durability of masonry, three with the disposal of radioactive waste, five with the principles of codification and control, three with durability of cement based products and two with use of colliery spoil to backfill limestone mines.

The integrity investigations continue to assess the implications of structural failures and developments in design and construction but, in addition, there has been an emphasis on investigation of the implications for dwellings of deterioration or poor quality of construction. Since June 1984, 10 investigations have been completed, arising from actual or potential deterioration or poor quality construction, including five types of prefabricated reinforced concrete housing.

The current programme of work includes 17 integrity investigations of various sizes, arising from failures, structural deterioration, innovations and new requirements. The programme also includes the necessary research drawing where appropriate on other parts of the establishment, and response to inquiries and issues arising from publications.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the work since June 1984 of the visitors panel of the Building Research Establishment; and whether he will list the current members of the panel.

Mr. John Patten: The panel's work has greatly assisted the director BRE in assessing and monitoring the quality of the establishment's research. The two annual reports so far submitted have made a valuable contribution to my Department's thinking on the establishment's future.

Members of the panel are:

Dr. R. E. Rowe CSE
Professor R. W. K. Honeycombe FRS
K. Newman BSc MICE
D. Quinlan BSc
P. A. Green BSc FICE
D. W. Lazenby DIC FICE FIStruct.E
C. Izzard FCIBS
Professor V. B. Torrance
D. Lush
Professor P. Gray FRS
Dr. W. A. Allen CBE FRIBA
Sir Kenneth Holland CBE QFSM
Dr. D. S. Belford
Professor T. Markus
Dr. W. W. L. Chan

Housing Associations

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what directions have been given by him to the Housing Corporation about charitable housing associations' voluntary sales policy and registration with the corporation.

Mr. Tracey: None.

Royal Mint

Mr. Andrew Faulds asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he did not accept the advice of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission that he call in for public inquiry the proposed building works at the grade II listed building housing the Royal Mint.

Mr. Waldegrave: The notification and advertisement procedures which apply to listed building consent applications are so designed to allow members of the public, local conservation bodies and the national amenity societies an opportunity to make representations. These procedures were followed and representations were received which identified the issues involved. The HBMC indicated that it was minded to authorise listed building consent, though it considered that a case for call-in existed. Having had regard to all the representations, it was not thought that a public inquiry was necessary and no overriding reason was seen to remove jurisdiction from the Tower Hamlets borough council and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission.

Hamilton Development (Leicester)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the proposed new development at Hamilton in north-east Leicester;

(2) what criteria he used in assessing the need for a large scale housing development at Hamilton in the Leicester, East constituency; and on what basis he considered such a development as environmentally desirable;

(3) what is his policy concerning the construction of large council housing estates; and how this policy is applied to the proposed Hamilton plan in Leicester.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Newham

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the housing investment programme allocation for the London borough of Newham for each of the last five years.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the level of rate support grant in cash terms for the London borough of Newham for each year since 1979.

Mr. Chope: The rate support grant paid to the London borough of Newham in respect of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87 inclusive are as follows in cash terms.

	£ million
1979-80	51·5
1980-81	60·3
1981-82	63·3
1982-83	74·0
1983-84	74·8
1984-85	70·7
1985-86	66·2
1986-87	74·1

Notes:

The figures for 1979-80 and 1980-81 are not comparable with those for 1981-82 to 1986-87 because they comprise the needs, resources and domestic elements whereas from 1981-82 onwards the figures comprise block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

The figures for 1981-2 to 1985-86 are not comparable with those for 1986-87 because of the abolition of the GLC on 31 March 1986.

All figures are in cash terms. Those for 1979-80 to 1982-83 are final entitlements. Domestic rate relief grant figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are final entitlement; those for 1985-86 and 1986-87 are first estimates. Block Grant figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are entitlements after holdback based upon provisional outturn; those for 1985-86 are entitlements after holdback based on budgets; those for 1986-87 are entitlements based on initial budget returns.

Anti-Fouling Paint

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the results of the first year's monitoring programme for TBT in the aquatic environment; and what further action he proposes to take.

Mr. Waldegrave: Preliminary results from the first year's monitoring programme indicate that the water target concentration for TBT of 20 nanograms per litre has been exceeded in six of the nine estuaries studied, at some time during the year; and that at a number of sites on the Broads with high densities of pleasure boats, levels significantly above this target concentration have been found.

The monitoring programme will continue during 1987 and will be modified to cover new areas of concern. In particular, an expanded survey of the Broads area is to be carried out in conjunction with Anglian water authority. The detailed results of the monitoring programme will be published in the scientific literature in the normal way.

I have written to the Paintmakers Association to advise it of our continuing concern over the problems caused by the use of organotin-based anti-fouling paints on small boats. I have warned it that unless there is a marked improvement in the monitoring results in the first half of the year — which I am advised seems unlikely — the Government will have to consider further measures later on this year. This might include a ban on the use of some of all organotin compounds in anti-fouling paints intended for small boats.

In relation to the current problem with the Broads, I have specifically asked the association to consider immediate restrictions on the marketing of TBT-based paints in the Broads area in favour of existing alternatives. In addition, the Broads Boat Hirers Association and the British Marine Industries Federation have agreed to participate in a separate initiative to persuade boat owners on the Broads to minimise the use of TBT anti-fouling paints during the 1987 season.

Homelessness

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the Report entitled "Homeless Young People in Britain: The contribution of the Private Sector", a copy of which has been sent to him by Duncan Guthrie, the director of the Disabilities Study Unit; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Young people stand to benefit from a number of Government measures in the housing field. I gave details in my answer of 26 November, at column 263, to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins).

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what research on nuclear waste management or disposal has been carried out at Potton Island, Essex.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply. None.

PRIME MINISTER

EC (Financial Problems)

Q181. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will propose to the next meeting of the European Council that consideration be given to the financial problems of the Community; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I doubt if this will be necessary. The Community's financial problems are certain to play a large part in the deliberations of the European Council and the Council of Ministers this year.

Engagements

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

Mr. Canavan asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the new governor of Hong Kong to be appointed.

Mrs. Chalker: An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* the salary of the governor of Hong Kong in pounds sterling.

Mr. Renton: The salary of the governor of Hong Kong is £93,327 per annum (at an exchange rate of £1:HK$11).

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current salary of the Hong Kong commissioner in London.

Mr. Renton: The current salary of the Hong Kong commissioner in London is HK$686,400 per annum (or £62,400 per annum, at an exchange rate of £1:HK$11).

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government of China are consulted on the appointment of the governor of Hong Kong.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost of the upkeep of the Hong Kong Government office in London in each of the past five years.

Mr. Renton: The cost of the upkeep of the Hong Kong Governent office in London in each of the current and past four financial years is as follows:

1982-83	HK$24·44 million (about £2·22 million)
1983-84	HK$25·42 million (about £2·31 million)
1984-85	HK$26·19 million (about £2·32 million)
1985-86	HK$24·54 million (about £2·45 million)
1986-87	HK$30·06 million (about £2·78 million)

(The exchange rates used were those in force at the time.)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make it his policy to seek to ensure that the next governor of Hong Kong be appointed from outside the Diplomatic Service; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration will be given to the appointment of a Chinese as governor of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Our concern is to ensure that the right person is appointed to this highly important post.

Ambassadors (Salaries)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current salary in pounds sterling of the ambassadors at Washington, Paris, Moscow and Peking.

Mr. Eggar: The annual salaries of Her Majesty's ambassadors at the following posts are:

	£
Washington	72,400
Paris	62,100
Moscow	50,150
Peking	50,150

These salary levels reflect the incumbents' grades.

Spain and Spanish Territories (British Citizens)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply of 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *271-2*, regarding the deaths of British travellers in Spain and Spanish territories, if he will provide such information as is available relating to a breakdown of the cause of death in each case identified in 1985 and 1986, and the subsequent outcome of any coroners' inquiries.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gary Maher

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will seek to obtain a transcript of the "Face the Facts" programme on BBC Radio 4 of 7 January regarding the death of Gary Maher and the near fatal injuries to his sister Sheree; if he will now make representations to the Spanish Government for the reopening of the inquiries into this case; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will outline the assistance given by Her Majesty's Government to the Maher family following the death of Gary Maher in Tenerife in February 1985, itemising those letters and telexes sent to the Spanish authorities regarding this case.

Mr. Eggar: A transcript of the programme has been made. Successive Governments have followed a policy whereby representations to another Government are considered only if all legal procedures available have been used and there appears to have been a miscarriage of justice. It appears that all legal avenues have not yet been exhausted in this case.

The consular department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has offered all proper assistance to the Maher family, including an offer of discussions with officials, and will continue to inform them and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) of any developments; consular officials remain ready to discuss the case with the Maher family.

Soviet Union (Claims Agreement)

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the arrangements for the distribution of the moneys received from the Soviet Union under the claims agreement of 15 July 1986.

Mr. Eggar: The Foreign Compensation (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (Registration and Determination of Claims) Order 1986 was laid before Parliament on 6 January 1987 and is due to enter into operation on 1 February. It provides for the Foreign Compensation Commission to register claims by British holders of Russian bonds and to determine and value claims by British and Commonwealth applicants wishing to benefit from the original property and personal injury claims registered between 1918 and 1951. Advertisements will shortly be placed in the national press indicating how detailed information may be obtained by potential claimants under the order. It is intended that this order should shortly be supplemented by a further Order in Council setting out the detailed arrangements for the distribution of compensation to successful claimants.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Pensioners (Television Licence)

55. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the relief of all retirement pensioners from the need to pay for a television licence.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans to propose the exemption of all retirement pensioners from the need to pay for a television licence.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *484*, what were the proceeds from the sale or auction of unclaimed wheel-clamped cars during the last year for which figures are available; what is the approximate cost of trying to trace the owner of an unclaimed vehicle; what is the average cost of clamping a vehicle; what has been the total revenue raised in each year since 1983 from unclamping fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The commissioner has indicated that the information available on the proceeds from the disposal of unclaimed vehicles does not distinguish between those initially wheel-clamped and those simply removed. In the financial year 1985-86 a total of £23,692 was raised through the sale for scrap or auctioning of all unclaimed removed vehicles. No estimate of the average cost of attempting to trace the owners of unclaimed vehicles is available. The average cost of clamping in the financial year 1985-86 was £22·35. The commissioner estimates that the income from wheel-clamping in each calendar year was as follows:

Period	*Revenue* £
1983 (from 16 May)	510,400
1984	840,000
1985	681,600
1986 (to 14 November)	686,400

Holloway Prison (Mother and Baby Unit)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the new mother and baby unit at Holloway is now in use;

(2) how long the new mother and baby unit at Holloway prison has been ready for use.

Mr. Mellor: The accommodation was completed in 1982; it was taken into use on 17 November 1986.

Women Prisons

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unsentenced women gave birth while serving custodial sentences in the year 1985-86; and what sentences they eventually received.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Table 4, appendix 7 of the report on the work of the prison department 1985-86 (Cmd. 11) records 71 female inmates temporarily removed to outside hospitals for delivery returning to the establishment afterwards, and one whose delivery took place within the establishment. This delivery accounts for the one live birth recorded in the table.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* how many women in prison are mothers of dependent children, *(b)* how many dependent children do these women have and *(c)* how many of these children are aged under 18 months.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. On 11 August 1986, 340 females in custody were known to be the mothers of 455 children aged five years or under, of whom 111 were 18 months or under.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* how many women were in custody with their children on the most recent convenient date, *(b)* in which prisons these women with their children were held, *(c)* what were the ages of the children and *(d)* for what offences these mothers had been imprisoned.

Mr. Mellor: The information is not readily available: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women in prison on the most recent convenient date were known to be pregnant.

Mr. Mellor: On 9 January, 18 adults and 11 youth custody trainees.

Radioactivity

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of north Wales on the items of equipment available for police use in an accident involving radioactive contamination at *(a)* A Division (Caernarfon), *(b)* B Division (Llandudno), *(c)* C Division (Prestatyn) and *(d)* D Division (Wrexham) of the north Wales police, listing in each case the number of (i) docsimeters, (ii) radiac survey meters, (iii) sets of protective clothing, (iv) breathing units and (v) decontamination units;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of north Wales on what training the police in *(a)* A Division (Caernarfon), *(b)* B Division (Llandudno), *(c)* C Division (Prestatyn) and *(d)* D Division (Wrexham) of the north Wales police have received to deal with accidents involving radioactivity; what regular exercises the division carries out to deal with such accidents; and at what intervals such exercises take place;

(3) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of north Wales on what exercises have taken place over the past five years to prepare the police of the north Wales constabulary for *(a)* an accident involving radioactive contamination and *(b)* evacuation of the population in the event of the worst case of nuclear reactor disaster under adverse meteorological conditions; and if he will list in each case which units participated.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the statement by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on his strategy for the coming year.

Mr. Hurd: I am placing copies of the commissioner's strategy statement for 1987 in the Library today. I am also sending a copy to all right hon. and hon. Members whose constituencies fall wholly or partly within the Metropolitan police district. I hope to meet London Members soon to discuss the statement.

I have discussed the commissioner's statement with him. The force goal for 1987 is to improve the quality of service to the public by:

(a) the reduction of criminal opportunity through crime prevention, public contact, involvement and co-operation;

(b) (i) the enhanced detection of specific criminal offences (for example, robbery, burglary, drug misuse, racial attacks, sexual offences against women and vandalism) in accordance with locally or centrally identified priorities;

(ii) a concerted attack on organised crime and the elimination of profits therefrom;

(c) the enhanced support, care and concern for victims of crime including the victims of domestic violence;

(d) improved effectiveness both in the preservation of public tranquility through closer community-police relations and in the policing of public disorder through better tactical control, communications, equipment and training.

I welcome the new emphasis on the care and support of victims of domestic violence, and the enhanced detection of sexual offences against women.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure White Paper

Mr. Soames asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to publish the 1987 public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. MacGregor: "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90" (Cmnd. 56, Vols I and II) will be published at noon on Wednesday 14 January, and copies will be available in the Vote Office.

Inland Revenue (Lloyd's Syndicates)

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been reached on negotiations with the Inland Revenue on its assent to the settlement of Lloyd's insurance with underwriters in the syndicates managed by Peter Cameron Webb.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is not the case that the settlement of Lloyd's internal matters depends on the Revenue's assent. Discussions are proceeding with a view to settling all the outstanding tax liabilities of members of Lloyd's as soon as possible.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of overseas investment in both current and constant price terms each year since 1960, with direct and portfolio investment differentiated for each year.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Annual information on the current value of transactions involving investment overseas by United Kingdom residents, distinguishing direct and portfolio investment, between 1964 and 1985 inclusive is given at table 1·4 of the "United Kingdom Balance of Payments" 1986 edition (The CSO Pink Book), a copy of which is in the Library. Later information up to the third quarter of 1986 is given in the press notice on the United Kingdom balance of payments issued on 4 December 1986.

Comparable information prior to 1964 and figures at constant prices are not available.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the gain or loss to those with incomes *(a)* under £5,000, *(b)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* £20,000 to £30,000, *(f)* £30,000 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,000 to £70,000 and over £70,000 a year as a result of each Finance Act since 1979, both in aggregate and per person on average in each of these categories, in each case indicating how much is due to indexation and how much is real gain.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1986]: The information is in the tables. For each financial year shown, the tables compare the yield from the tax regime in that year with the 1978-79 tax regime. All estimates are calculated on a provisional estimate of the 1986-87 tax base and all tax regimes have been indexed to 1986-87 levels by reference to the statutory formula. The comparisons therefore allow for budgetary changes in income tax rates and allowances, but not for any changes since 1978-79 in the definition of the income tax base.

The first table shows the total reduction (+) or increase (−) in tax yield from each income range; and the second table shows the average change for individual tax units.

As child tax allowances were being phased out in 1978-79, they have been excluded from the comparison.

It is not possible to provide useful estimates of the liabilities in 1986-87 for the 1978-79 regime without indexation since Inland Revenue records do not cover many of the people who would be brought into tax by such low levels of personal allowances. A partial analysis with incomplete coverage would be misleading.

Reductions(+)/Increases(−) in income tax compared with 1978-79 indexed regime

Range of total Income in 1986-87[1]	*Number units paying tax in 1986-87 (million)*	*(£ million)*							
		1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Under 5,000	3·8	250	110	−310	−270	−30	110	240	280
5,000 to 10,000	7·8	1,220	740	−240	−140	420	810	1,130	1,420
10,000 to 15,000	4·9	1,330	950	200	290	710	1,110	1,370	1,720
15,000to 20,000	2·2	880	670	270	320	540	790	930	1,160
20,000 to 30,000	1·3	990	810	320	390	660	900	1,010	1,210
30,000 to 50,000	0·4	920	810	470	510	690	910	960	1,030
50,000 to 70,000	0·07	380	350	260	270	310	380	390	400
Over 70,000	0·05	770	750	680	690	730	870	880	880
Total	20·5	6,740	5,190	1,650	2,060	4,030	5,880	6,910	8,100

Range of total Income in 1986-87[1]	*Average gain (+)/loss(−) per tax unit (£ per annum)*							
	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
[2]Under 5,000	60	30	−70	−60	−10	30	60	60
[2]5,000 to 10,000	150	90	−30	−20	50	100	140	180
10,000 to 15,000	270	190	40	60	140	230	280	350
15,000 to 20,000	400	300	120	150	250	360	420	530
20,000 to 30,000	760	630	250	300	510	700	780	930
30,000 to 50,000	2,080	1,830	1,060	1,160	1,570	2,060	2,170	2,320
50,000 to 70,000	5,550	5,100	3,780	3,950	4,650	5,680	5,840	5,930
Over 70,000	16,900	16,400	14,800	15,000	15,800	18,900	19,100	19,100
Total	320	250	80	100	190	280	330	380

[1] All information is in terms of tax units—that is married couples are counted as one and their incomes combined.
[2] Average gains and losses are calculated by reference to the estimated number who would be liable to pay tax under the indexed 1978-79 regime; this number is some 900,000 greater than the numbers paying tax in 1986-87, some 750,000 in the income range below £5,000 and 150,000 in the range £5,000 to £10,000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives his Department takes in advising medical schools to provide training for medical practitioners in the care of the incontinent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The content of undergraduate medical education is a matter for universities within broad guidelines laid down by the General Medical Council.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) to what extent he encourages the provision of district continence nurse advisers; what encouragement he gives for the development of such services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice, encouragement and guidance his Department gives for the establishment of walk-in or self-referral continence clinics; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that minimum acceptable standards of care for incontinent persons are available within each district health authority in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: It is for the health and social services boards to assess and decide the type and level of provision required and the priority they attach to the development of incontinence services in the light of local needs and circumstances. Whilst I would expect health and social services boards to provide acceptable incontinence services, I do not intend to set minimum standards of care for incontinent persons or to offer advice to boards on the appointment of continence nurse advisers and the establishment of clinics.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department will provide vocational courses on the control and care of incontinent persons for general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Department, through the Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical Education, provides a comprehensive range of courses covering all fields relevant to general practice. Incontinence is included as a module in several of these courses.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give an estimate of the number of male incontinent persons in the age brackets 15 to 64 and 65-plus years in Northern Ireland; if he will give the same estimates for females; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: No reliable estimates are currently available.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what advice his Department gives to health authorities regarding the importance of medical-surgical management and nursing care management of incontinent patients; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice he gives regarding the provision of continence advice and service; what information he has on variations in care of incontinent patients from one area to

another; if he will write to each health board concerning provision for the treatment of incontinence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The management and treatment of incontinence is a matter for professional medical and nursing staff. Information on the care of incontinent patients is not collected centrally. The Department of Health and Social Services recognises the important contribution which the correct treatment and management of incontinence makes to the well-being of incontinent patients and co-operates with professional bodies in the provision of suitable training for staff. I have no plans to write to health and social services boards on this subject.

EMPLOYMENT

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster General how many people in the north-east region of Yorkshire were employed under the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Lee: On 5 January 1987, there were six people in the north-east region of Yorkshire who are employed under the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster General what was the cost of the sheltered placement schemes for disabled people in 1986; and what will be the estimated cost for 1987.

Mr. Lee: The estimated cost of the sheltered placement scheme to central Government in the calendar year 1986 is £5·4 million. Decisions have not yet been taken on the level of central Government spending on the scheme in 1987-88.

Disabled People

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster General (1) if his Department will make arrangements with the Department of Health and Social Security whereby disabled people attending employment rehabilitation courses could continue to receive their social security benefits including housing benefit;

(2) if he will require the Manpower Services Commission to increase rehabilitation allowances in excess of state benefits as an incentive for clients to attend rehabilitation courses.

Mr. Lee: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Paymaster General how many people have been registered as unemployed in the London borough of Newham in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lee: Following is the available information, which is also in the Library. The table shows the numbers of unemployed claimants in the London borough of Newham in November of each year since 1983. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986. Statistics of unemployment for local authority districts are derived from the ward-based system and are available only from June 1983.

	Number
November 1983	15,993
November 1984	16,509
November 1985	17,191
November 1986	17,187

Employee Involvement Statements

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General what further conclusions he has drawn from more recent employee involvement statements in company directors' reports in accordance with section 235 and schedule 7 of part V of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today placed a survey of a sample of recent reports in the Library of the House. It indicates that more companies are reporting a wide range of employee involvement arrangements than we observed previously.

National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General whether the National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People has been reconstituted.

Mr. Lee: My right hon. and noble Friend has reconstituted the National Advisory Council on Employment of Disabled People for a further period of three years from 1 January 1987.

The members of the reconstituted council are:

Chairman
Mr. F. A. Baker, CBE

Members appointed after consultation with employers' organisations
Mr. J. A. F. Bruce
Dr. I. M. Dawson, MB, BS, MFOM, DIS
Mr. D. G. Dodds, CBE
Mr. J. K. Gillespie
Mr. J. W. Threadingham, MBE

Members appointed after consultation with the TUC
Mr. M. A. Barrett
*Ms. O. Davies
Ms J. Grant
Mr. J. L. Jones, CH, MBE
Mr. R. R. Webster

Local Authority Representative
Mr. D. James

Independent Members
*Mr. D. Blezard, OBE
*Mr. I. W. Bruce, BSC, AMBIM
*Mrs. S. M. Harold, MA, FBIM, MBcS, F Inst D, MIDPM
Mr. C. Heginbotham, BSc, MSc
*Mrs. A. Hill, CBE
*Mr. P. Large, MBE
Mrs. M. MacKenzie, MBE, TD
Mr. T. B. Owen, CBE, MA
Dr. J. R. Oxley, MRCP
*Mr. T. V. F. Papé, BSc
*Dr. J. Sandhu, Dip AD, M Des RCA, B Ed, FSIAD, FRSA
Mr. A. Smith, FIPM
*Dr. J. F. Taylor, MBChB, DPH, DIH, MFOM
*Mrs. W. L. Tumin, MA, Dip Soc Stud, Dip Ling
*Mr. P. A. A. Waring, MSc
Mr. G. Wilson, MBE, MA

* New members of the council

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the council for the valuable advice it continues to offer in this important area.

Employment Prospects

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate the effect on employment prospects of *(a)* the free trade zones and *(b)* the enterprise zones.

Mr. Lee: There are no free trade zones in the United Kingdom. However, in 1984 six freeports were designated as an experiment to test their usefulness as a stimulus to economic activity. Their designation was not primarily intended or presented by the Government as an employment or job creation initiative. However, at 1 July 1986 around 100 persons were directly employed full-time in the freeports.

Britain's 23 enterprise zones had 53,500 employees in December 1985, some 20,000 of these jobs having been created since designation, and there is no reason to suppose that the good progress made so far cannot be continued. Comprehensive information on enterprise zones is contained in the Department of the Environment's report "Enterprise Zone Information 1984-1985", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

WALES

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department takes in advising medical schools to provide training for medical practitioners in the care of the incontinent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Department has no direct involvement in the academic content of courses arranged by the University of Wales college of medicine.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) to what extent he encourages the provision of district continence nurse advisers; what encouragement he gives for the development of such services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice, encouragement and guidance his Department gives for the establishment of walk-in or self-referral continence clinics; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that minimum acceptable standards of care for incontinent persons are available within each district health authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Whilst I would expect all health authorities to provide acceptable incontinence services, I do not intend to prescribe in detail how such services should be provided or set specific standards of care, since it is for individual authorities to decide for themselves both the level of provision, and the pace and direction of further developments in their services, in the light of their local needs and circumstances.

In 1977, the Welsh Office wrote to all health authorities advising them that the management of incontinence should be clearly identified as the responsibility of a designated special nurse, who should act as a "resource person" for nurses working in hospitals and the community services. Since then, most district health authorities have appointed at least one continence adviser. Community nurses also provide advice and assessment as part of their nursing duties.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department will provide vocational courses on the control and care of incontinent persons for general practioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Department does not directly provide vocational courses in any medical or surgical discipline, and would not wish to interfere in the excellent facilities for continuing education already available.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give an estimate of the number of male incontinent persons in the age brackets 15 to 64 years an 65 plus in Wales; and if he will give the same estimates for females; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The specific information requested for Wales is not available centrally.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice his Department gives to health authorities regarding the importance of medical-surgical management and nursing-care management of incontinent patients; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice he gives regarding the provision of continence advice and service; and what information he has on variations in care of incontinent patients from one area to another; if he will write to each health authority concerning provision for the treatment of incontinence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Although data about incontinence services in particular districts are not routinely collected, information about these services is regularly included in the reports of the Health Advisory Service, and is also obtained informally by the Department's own officers.

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of the important contribution which the correct management of incontinence, and the provision of appropriate services, can make to enable those suffering from this distressing condition to obtain help and remain in their own homes in the community.

A considerable amount of research, much of it funded by the DHSS and the Welsh Office, has been carried out into various aspects of incontinence. For example, the results of a study of incontinence pads and garments was published in October 1986 by the DHSS and Welsh Office in the health equipment information series. In order to bring together the wide range or recently completed work, the Government are funding a research review by the nursing practice research unit at Surrey university.

Welsh Quality Lamb Ltd.

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to help farmers who suffered financial losses when Welsh Quality Lamb Ltd. went into liquidation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No. Sales of livestock to Welsh Quality Lamb Ltd. were a matter of private commercial contract.

DEFENCE

Potton Island, Essex

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Defence what military nuclear research has been carried out at Potton Island, Essex.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Amphibious Capability

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *178*, about the amphibious capability study (i) when he expects to complete the study of providing helicopter lift, including the concept of an aviation support ship, (ii) what criteria are to be involved; and (iii) what basic requirements as to the: *(a)* number of ships, *(b)* number of helicopters per ship, *(c)* number of marines to be carried per ship and *(d)* degree of protection to be provided he has laid down.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We shall be addressing the means of providing helicopter lift in support of amphibious operations over the next few months. The number of ships will be addressed within our consideration of the overall shape of the amphibious package. Details of the criteria involved are confidential.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *178*, about amphibious capability (i) when he expects Swan Hunter to complete the feasibility study into extending the life of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, (ii) when he expects to complete feasibility studies for a new design option for their replacement and (iii) which companies will be invited to do this work.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I would expect Swan Hunters to complete the feasibility study into extending the lives of HMS Fearless and Intrepid next summer. As for feasibility studies into the option of building new ships, letters have now been sent to some 80 firms asking whether they wish to participate in this work. On current plans I would expect these studies to be completed in the summer of 1988, with evaluation taking about a further year.

Meteorological Office (Services)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, in simplified form, the scale of charges from the Meteorological Office for aviation services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The CAA determines what services the Meteorological Office should provide to civil aviation, in fulfilment of international and domestic agreements. The charges for these services are made to the CAA at full cost, that is they include both the direct cost and a share of the core overhead cost.

Air operators and others in civil aviation who require meteorological information over and above that supplied by agreement with the CAA are charged on a repayment basis that is similar to that applying for other commercial users of the services of the Office.

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, in simplified form, the scale of charges from the Meteorological Office for marine services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no scale of Meteorological Office charges for marine services.

In fulfilment of the United Kingdom's obligations as a signatory of the safety of life at sea agreement under the auspices of the International Maritime Organisation, no charge is made for the weather bulletins for shipping or for the sea area gale warnings as broadcast by the BBC and by coastal radio stations.

Other marine services, including for example those for the routeing of individual ships, for towing, for transfer of cargo at sea and for offshore oil and gas drilling rigs and production platforms, are provided on repayment. The charges are assessed on a case-by-case basis to cover direct costs plus a share of the costs of the core overheads.

The Meteorological Office has very recently arranged to provide a premium rated telephone forecast service for inshore mariners, including yachtsmen. This is known as Marinecall.

Nuclear Missiles

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken by Her Majesty's Government during the past three months involving contracts with British Aerospace for the development of a facility for the airborne launching of nuclear missiles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Nimrod

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he made before reaching his decision to cancel the Nimrod project as to whether Boeing or GEC was the more likely to resolve first the vital question of secure data links for the airborne early warning system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Boeing offered to deliver its first aircraft complete with JTIDS/Link 16 before GAv. We considered the risk associated with both proposals to be of the same order on this particular area.

Plessey

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will hold discussions with Plessey about the eventual control of the high technology development as a result of its £1,000 million agreement with Boeing; and whether it will pass to American control.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

Army Officers (Education)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out for each of the last 10 years the percentage of officers who have attended in their main schools *(a)* independent boarding, *(b)* grammar schools and *(c)* other schools, for each of (i) the Household Brigade, (ii) the Royal Armoured Corps excluding the Royal Tank Regiment and (iii) the Army as a whole.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

AIDS and Venereal Disease

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what orders or advice have been issued to members of each of the armed forces about the dangers of AIDS; and when they were issued;

(2) over what period the 1st Battalion Queen's Own Highlanders was stationed in Kenya;

(3) when his Department and the Royal Army Medical Corps, respectively, became aware that the AIDS virus was common in parts of Kenya;

(4) when his Department and the Royal Army Medical Corps, respectively, first became aware the AIDS virus could be transmitted by heterosexual relations;

(5) what orders or advice on the risk of AIDS from prostitutes in Kenya were given to officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion Queen's Own Highlanders;

(6) how many of all ranks of the 1st Battalion Queen's Own Highlanders are known to the Royal Army Medical Corps to have venereal disease caught in Kenya.

Mr. Freeman: I shall reply shortly.

Nimrod

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost at 1986 prices of the Nimrod aircraft currently in service with the armed services *(a)* when they were first commissioned and *(b)* at the present day, including the costs of any updating or improvements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1986, c. *597*]: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) Mk2 aircraft. These were converted from the Nimrod MR Mk1 aircraft, the original cost of which is not readily available and could not be provided except at disproportionate expense.

ENERGY

Miners (Redundancy Pay)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners have taken redundancy pay *(a)* during the miners strike and *(b)* since the strike ended; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: During the 1984-85 financial year, the year of the miners' strike, approximately 8,000 men left the industry under the redundant mineworkers payments scheme. From the end of that financial year to the end of December 1986 a further 56,000 qualified under the scheme. The reduction in manpower has enabled British Coal to make impressive gains in productivity.

SCOTLAND

Industrial Assistance

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the level of uptake of selective assistance to industry under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 in cash terms for Scotland in each year since 1982 and *(b)* the percentage change in level of uptake between years.

Mr. Rifkind: Offers of regional selective assistance accepted by businesses in Scotland in each year since 1982 and the associated percentage changes between these values are given in the table.

	Value of offers accepted £ million	*Percentage change between years*
1982-83	52·2	—
1983-84	39·6	−24
1984-85	58·5	+48
1985-86	60·5	+3

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. McKelvey asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many assisted place scheme pupils in Ayrshire currently receive free school meals; and what has been the corresponding total for each year since the scheme began;

(2) which schools in Ayrshire are currently participating in the assisted places scheme; how much each is receiving towards the cost of the scheme in the current year; and what has been the total amount spent on the scheme in Ayrshire since it was introduced;

(3) what is the total number of pupils currently receiving an assisted place in schools in Ayrshire; what percentage of the total school roll at such schools they comprise; and how many of them are already attending a fee-paying school;

(4) if he will list the amount spent on (a) travel grants and (b) clothing grants to pupils on assisted places schemes in Ayrshire schools since the scheme was introduced.

Mr. John MacKay: Wellington school, Ayr, is the only school in Ayrshire to have participated in the assisted places scheme. The school was admitted to the scheme in school session 1982-83 and currently has 39 assisted pupils, 12 of whom attended a fee-paying school before taking up an assisted place. Assisted pupils form 7·7 per cent. of the current school roll. The additional information is as follows:

School year	*Expenditure (£)*	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Number of assisted pupils receiving free school meals*	*Expenditure on travel grants (£)*	*Expenditure on clothing grants (£)*
1982-83	2,742	3	Nil	251	54
1983-84	19,784	18	Nil	671	598
1984-85	37,419	27	2	1,385	491
1985-86	55,446	39	2	1,255	380
1986-87[1]	62,779	39	2	2,500	833

[1] Provisional figures

Chapelcross (Radioactivity)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the critical groups of members of the public in the vicinity of Chapelcross for (a) direct emissions of radioactivity, (b) gaseous discharges of radioactive waste and (c) liquid discharges of radioactive waste; what are the pathways of exposure in each case; whether an individual may be a member of more than one critical group; what scientific method is adopted for individuals being members of more than one critical group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Scottish Development Department statistical bulletin No. 4/1984 tabulates the actual exposure pathways to the associated critical groups in respect of radioactive waste disposal for Chapelcross and describes the procedure followed when the same people are known to be members of more than one critical group.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what fraction or percentage of what recognised dose limit for members of the public was used as a target level for maximum exposure of members of the public in issuing new certificates of authorisation for radioactive discharges from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, Chaplecross in April; whether this target level was applied to calculations of exposure arising only from operations at Chaplecross; whether this target level was applied to calculations of exposure arising from all sources of radiation other than naural and medical; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The certificates of authorisation issued in respect of Chapelcross works are consistent with the Government's objectives for radioactive waste management as set out in the White Paper (Cmnd. 9852), "Radioactive Waste: The Government's response to the Environment Committee's Report", and take into account exposure from all sources, excluding natural and medical.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *134*, concerning radiation exposure of the public arising from operations at Chapelcross, what proportion of radiation doses received by members of critical groups in the vicinity of Chapelcross arises from other discharges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The levels of artificial radioactivity detectable in the inner Solway, which are low, result in part from the distant effects of Sellafield. Estimates of the contribution of this component to the doses to the critical group identified in respect of Chapelcross discharges are given in the aquatic environment monitoring reports of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which are available in the Library.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *134*, if he will publish a table similar to the table on page 2 of the Scottish Development Department's "Statistical Bulletin No. 4, 1984" showing a summary of pathways of public radiation exposure in the vicinity of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, Chapelcross in each year from 1981 to 1985 and showing the effective dose equivalent for each year in millisieverts.

Mr. Ancram: A statistical bulletin containing information in similar form to that of bulletin No. 4/1984 will be published shortly.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *134*, on the most recent assessment of annual dose levels, when the habits survey used in calculating such exposures was last revised; when the physiological uptake factors used in calculating such exposures were last revised; whether calculations of maximum exposures of members of the public in the vicinity of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd, Chapelcross in each year 1981 to 1995 inclusive have been revised to take account of the latest habit survey and uptake factors now available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The last formal habits survey was undertaken in 1982, but all factors relevant to the estimation of public radiation exposure from controlled disposal of radioactive waste are kept under review and assessments are revised in the light of the latest information available.

Fishing Industry

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange to meet the leaders of the Scottish fishing industry to discuss in detail the recently announced total allowable catches for 1987 and their implication for the industry.

Mr. John MacKay: I met industry representatives before I attended the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 17 and 18 December 1986, at which the 1987 total allowable catches were agreed, during a convenient break in the course of the Council meeting and also immediately after that meeting. I am satisfied that the agreed total allowable catches strike the correct balance between the current needs of the industry and the protection of fish stocks for future years.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange, as a matter of urgency, to meet the leaders of the fish processing industry in Scotland to discuss the impact on the economic future of that industry of the recently announced total allowable catches for 1987.

Mr. John MacKay: I discussed this issue with representatives of the fish processing industry when I attended the annual dinner of the Scottish Fish Merchants' Federation on 12 December 1986. My officials also met representatives of the industry earlier that month.

I am well aware of the fish processors' concern about the reduced white fish quotas in 1987. It is, however, in the industry's long-term interests that steps should be taken now to conserve important fish stocks.

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what intiatives his Department takes in advising medical schools to provide training for medical practitioners in the care of the incontinent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: None. The undergraduate curriculum in medical schools is a matter for the universities to determine taking account of guidance issued from time to time by the General Medical Council.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) to what extent he encourages the provision of district continence nurse advisers; what encouragement he gives for the development of such services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that minimum acceptable standards of care for incontinent persons are available within each district health authority in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what advice his Department gives to health authorities regarding the importance of medical-surgical management and nursing-care management of incontinent patients; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what advice he gives regarding the provision of continence advice and service; what information he has on variations in care of incontinent patients from one area to another; if he will write to each health authority concerning provision for the treatment of incontinence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Guidance was issued in 1976 and 1977 to health boards and local authorities on the provision of aids and facilities for incontinent people. The results of a research study of incontinence pads and garments were sent to health boards in October 1986. It is for health boards to determine the level of service provision in the light of local needs and circumstances and information on an area basis about the incidence of incontinence and service provision is not held centrally. The term "continence adviser" is not generally used in Scotland but advice to individuals is given by general practitioners, district nurses, health visitors and social workers. Nurses with specialised expertise hold continence clinics and organise training programmes.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department will provide vocational courses on the control and care of incontinent persons for general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Postgraduate education, including vocational training for general practitioners, is funded by the Department and provided through regional post-graduate committees and the postgraduate deans and regional advisers in general practice who are also responsible for determining the subject matter of the training courses offered. I understand that at least two courses dealing specifically with incontinence have been arranged for 1987. The topic will invariably be covered in other courses dealing with care of the elderly, terminally ill and neurological diseases.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice, encouragement and guidance his Department gives for the establishment of walk-in or self-referral continence clinics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The establishment of such clinics is a matter for each health board to determine on the basis of its knowledge of the needs and priorities of its own area.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give an estimate of the number of male incontinent persons in the age brackets 15 to 64 and 65 plus years in Scotland; if he will give the same estimates for females; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is not available centrally.

Archaeological Officers

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will issue guidance to local authorities advising them of the need to appoint archaeological officers if they have not already done so.

Mr. Ancram: It is entirely for authorities to decide in the light of their local circumstances whether or not they need to employ archaeologists.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Supplementary Benefit

11. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many working people presently claim supplementary benefit; and what is the comparable figure for January 1980.

Mr. Lyell: Supplementary benefit is not payable to those in full-time work. The relevant benefit in the case of families with children is family income supplement. The number of families receiving family income supplement has increased from 82,000 in January 1980 to 210,000 in September 1986.

48. **Mr. Harris** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to raise the £3,000 capital limit for supplementary benefit.

Mr. Major: Not in the short term. However, we have announced proposals for more generous treatment of capital in the income support scheme which is to replace supplementary benefit from April 1988. We propose that the capital limit will be doubled to £6,000, but a weekly income of £1 will be assumed for bands of capital of £250 between £3,000 and £6,000.

Doctors (NHS Appointments)

12. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which member of the National Health Service management board is responsible for ensuring that sufficient numbers and grades of doctors are available for appointment to National Health Service posts.

Mr. Newton: Overall responsibility rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services whose advisers include the National Health Service mangement board, which I chair.

AIDS

13. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome have been diagnosed to date; and how many deaths have resulted from the disease.

Mr. Fowler: The figure at the end of December 1986 was 610, of whom 293 have died.

19. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action his Department is taking to train counsellors for AIDS victims; and what numbers of counsellors are estimated to be needed by 1994.

Mr. Newton: We have provided funding for programmes of training in counselling at three centres—in London, Birmingham and Bolton. More than 2,350 people have been on courses provided by the London and Bolton units. It is not at present possible to estimate the number of counsellors who will be needed in 1994.

34. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the impact amongst the general public of the Government's recent publicity campaign on the dangers of AIDS.

Mr. Newton: There is a continuing programme of research to monitor the effectiveness of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome publicity campaign and a full assessment will be made when detailed results are available. An initial evaluation of the newspaper advertising in November showed an encouraging response; the advertisements put across the main messages well and 69 per cent. of adults interviewed claimed to have seen at least one advertisement, an unusually high level of recall.

37. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now approve a scheme for the supply of clean needles for drug addicts to prevent the further spread of the AIDS virus.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on 18 December 1986 at column *703*.

50. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the programme of research into the causes of and cures for AIDS being sponsored by his Department.

Mr. Newton: Last year we had nine parliamentary questions and six letters from hon. Members about research relating to acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

East Birmingham Hospital

15. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the resources allocated to the East Birmingham hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department has received a number of representations about East Birmingham's financial problems. The allocation of resources to district health authorities is, however, a matter for regional health authorities which are best placed to make the necessary judgments. This year (1986-87) the West Midlands health region is getting a cash increase of 8·5 per cent., taking its annual revenue allocation to over £1 billion. As I have explained, it is for the West Midlands regional health authority to decide how best to divide this growth money between its 22 districts.

Abortions

16. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the criterion for allowing late abortions by the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: We have received one letter and responded to five Parliamentary questions about the guidance given to regional health authorities.

Hospital and Community Health Services

17. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the additional cost in 1987-88 of paying in full the pay awards agreed in the current year for hospital and community health services staff in England and Wales.

Mr. Newton: The additional cost in 1987-88 to health authorities in England of the pay awards made to review body staff in 1986 will be some £94 million. This, together with the cost of pay increases for other staff will be met from the total resources available to authorities which will include an additional £626 million — a 6 per cent. increase over 1986-87 — and the benefits of their cost improvement programmes.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Board and Lodging Regulations

20. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he plans to make any changes to the board and lodgings regulations in the light of the special supplement on changes in board and lodging regulations issued recently by the board and lodging information programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: No. Some of the advice in the supplement is inaccurate. The chief adjudication officer has advised adjudication officers to disregard it.

Severe Weather Payments

21. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the operation of the revised system of exceptionally severe weather payments.

39. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what further information he has received about the operation of the severe weather payments scheme.

Mr. Major: The arrangement with the Meteorological Office is for information on temperatures recorded at designated weather stations over a fixed seven-day period to be received by the Department on the following Tuesday. One weather station, Eskdalemuir, recorded an average weekly temperature below minus 1·5 deg. C. in the week ending 11 January, and arrangements are in hand to publicise the availability of these payments in the area which is covered by the Galashiels local office.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what plans he has to publicise the new severe weather payments; on what date the new leaflet will be published; and where the new leaflet will be placed for public information;

(2) if he will give *(a)* the minimum night temperature, *(b)* the daily mean temperature and *(c)* the weekly mean temperature for each of the weather stations used for calculating severe weather payments for the week 5 January to 11 January inclusive;

(3) if he will give a list of the weather stations not included in the list of those used for calculating severe weather payments, indicating which of them had *(a)* minimum night temperatures of −1·5 deg C or below on any night, *(b)* daily mean temperatures of −1·5 deg C or below and *(c)* weekly mean temperatures of −1·5 deg C or below for the week 5 January to 11 January inclusive.

Mr. John Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Councillors (Attendance Allowances)

22. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the effect of councillors' attendance allowances on social security benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: Last year we had 33 letters on the subject. Early in the year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received representations from the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) about this issue. More recently, my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security received three deputations, led by the right hon. Member for Ashton under Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant) and the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) involving other hon. Members and representatives from councillors' organisations. We are considering the points they made.

Merseyside

23. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the latest waiting lists for the Mersey regional health authority and the Liverpool teaching health authority.

Mr. Newton: The latest figures show that, while the total on the list is significantly below previous years and has remained stable over the last year, Mersey regional health authority has already made substantial progress in reducing the proportion of patients who have to wait excessively for treatment. For Liverpool district health authority, for example, the proportion on the waiting list for over a year is under two thirds of the national average. Both the region and Liverpool district have ambitious plans in hand to make further progress.

Supplementary Benefit Office (The Oval)

24. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the reopening of the Oval SE5 supplementary benefit office.

Mr. Lyell: The Department regrets that its Oval office was unable to open to the public between 22 October 1986 and 21 November 1986.

On 22 October 1986 an attack by a claimant caused damage to furniture and fittings in the public reception area and the office had to be closed from that date to enable repairs to be made. The damage was made good by 13 November 1986 but the office could not be reopened because some members of staff were taking industrial action.

The industrial action ceased on 24 November 1986 and the office reopened to the public on that day.

Save a Life Campaign

25. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the public response to the Save a Life Campaign in relation to immediate care.

Mrs. Currie: The Save a Life Campaign was initiated by the Royal Society of Medicine and is intended to promulgate simple life-saving techniques among the general public.

We have been very pleased with the public response to this campaign. I understand that the average audience for the BBC television programmes was 7 million: by Christmas, nearly 70,000 inquiries had been received by the campaign office, and over 17,000 people were known to have attended classes. I have myself attended a Save a Life class in London and I was very impressed by the clarity of instruction and the enthusiasm shown. The BBC will also broadcast a follow-up programme to the campaign and will be repeating the series later in the year.

I would like to congratulate all concerned, but especially the volunteer staff, the BBC, and the British Heart Foundation, who made a substantial contribution.

Social Security Budget

26. **Mrs. Beckett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest assessment of the net effect on the 1987-88 social security budget of the changes made in the social security review.

Mr. Major: The net effect on public expenditure on social security of the reform measures which will have been introduced by the end of 1987-88 is estimated to be a reduction in that year of about £220 million.

Invalid Care Allowance

27. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the restricted time period during which married women could apply for invalid care allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: There is no deadline for applications from married women to receive invalid care allowance from current date, plus up to 12 months arrears subject to qualifying conditions being met. A deadline of 31 December 1986 was, however, fixed for claims attracting arrears back to 22 December 1984, the date of implementation of the European Community's equal treatment directive. To ensure that as many people as possible were aware of this, we arranged an extensive publicity campaign and we have written to 400,000 attendance allowance clamants who are paid by computer. So far 90,000 married women have claimed ICA, but claims are still coming in at the rate of 2,000 a week.

Representations about the deadline for claiming full arrears have been received from the Child Poverty Action Group, the Vice President of the European Parliament, the noble Lord, Lord Ennals, the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), my hon. Friends the Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Brunivels) and for Newark (Mr. Alexander), the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) and the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). When the decision to extend ICA to married women was announced last summer, we thought that six months would be sufficient time for these back-dated claims, and set the deadline accordingly. However, in view of the representations made, and the rate at which claims are still being received, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 22 December that the deadline was being extended to 31 August 1987. We will also be writing to other attendance allowance beneficiaries who are paid by local offices over the next few months when their order books are renewed.

35. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many married women have applied for invalid care allowance in the last few months.

Mr. Major: In the period between 23 June 1986, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the intention to extend invalid care allowance to married women, and 19 December 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, 77,000 claims have been received from married women.

Cervical Cancer Screening

28. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any additional resources are to be provided to local health authorities to implement fully computerised call and recall systems for cervical cancer screening; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: No additional resources are to be provided, and we are satisfied that, at the present time, none are called for. Improvements to cervical cancer screening programmes have been made a service development priority for all health authorities, and as a result all authorities plan to have computerised call and recall screening systems in place by April 1988.

Residential Care

29. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will review the current regulations concerning the licensing and registration of residential care homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) on 19 November 1986 at column *217*.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the control of standards of care provided in board and lodging houses, private nursing homes and residential care houses.

Mrs. Currie: Nursing homes must be registered by district health authorities under part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984 and residential care homes by local social services authorities under part I of the Act. The services and facilities to be provided in these homes are specified respectively in the Nursing Homes and Mental Nursing Homes Regulations 1984 and the Residential Care Homes Regulations 1984, as amended. The Department has issued general guidance to both types of registration authorities and has commended to health authorities a handbook produced by the National Association of Health Authorities and to local authorities the code of practice for residential care, "Home Life".

Health authorities are obliged to inspect nursing homes at least twice a year and local authorities to inspect residential care homes at least once a year. Authorities are encouraged to inspect more frequently, if necessary. Inspections may be at any time of the day or night, and without notice.

For information about a study of the effects of the new registration arrangements for residential care homes I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) on 19 November 1986, at column *217*. Local authorities have powers under the Housing Acts to monitor houses in multiple occupation and this control is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Sick Pay

30. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people will lose from the abolition of the middle rate of statutory sick pay.

Mr. Lyell: It is estimated that in a full year some 400,000 spells of statutory sick pay are payable at the middle rate. But many employees will be covered by their employers' occupational sick pay scheme and will not therefore suffer any loss in income.

Hospital Building Programme

31. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's estimate of the number of hospital beds within the present hospital building programme.

51. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the capital building programme in the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: The current National Health Service building programme in England comprises over 400 schemes, each costing over £1 million, at various stages of planning, design and construction. Of these, about 110 schemes are planned for completion over the next three years. The total cost of the programme, including fees and equipment, is about £3 billion and it will provide over 21,500 new hospital beds.

The programme includes new hospitals which will meet health care needs in new towns and other centres of expanding population such as Milton Keynes, Telford and Bournemouth. At St. Mary's Paddington and Manchester royal infirmary new facilities will replace obsolete and inefficient buildings dating back to the last century. Other smaller schemes will provide accommodation in the community for the elderly, mentally ill and handicapped patients to enable them to be cared for near their homes and families.

The modern hospitals coming into operation are more economical to run than those they replace. Close attention to planning procedures and the use of the nucleus standard design, developed by the Department, have largely eliminated the escalating costs and late completions which held up the building programme in the past.

Single Payments (Insulation)

32. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to retain single payments as of right for insulation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Under regulation 18 of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1981, supplementary benefit claimants may receive a lump sum payment of benefit to meet the cost of materials to carry out simple draught-proofing measures in their homes.

We are considering future arrangements for help with draught-proofing with the other Government Departments concerned, in the context of the overall help available to people on low incomes with energy conservation measures.

Diabetics

33. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what further single consideration has been given to the possibility of making disposable syringes and blood glucose monitoring strips available on general practitioner prescription to diabetics.

Mrs. Currie: We are keeping the position under review.

Personal Social Services

36. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the commitment given by the Government in its response to recommendation 18 in the Social Services Committee's report on "Public Expenditure on the Social Services", H.C. Paper 387, he will indicate his precise plans for obtaining the information requested about the provision of personal social services; and, in particular, which social services departments will be selected for assessment of the consequences of inadequate personal social services spending growth.

Mr. Newton: The Government's response to this recommendation promised to see what information could be provided. We made it clear that analysis of changes in spending levels does not necessarily give an indication of the adequacy of current spending. There are many factors to be taken into account. We are undertaking work on financial, population and activity data available to the Department to see if any useful results can be obtained. This work is not yet completed. It is too early to assess the results or to indicate which individual social services departments might need further scrutiny.

Basingstoke and District Hospital

38. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what trend there has been in waiting lists for treatment at the Basingstoke and District hospital since 1983.

Mr. Newton: Information is given in the table. This suggests that the disappointing upward trend at Basingstoke district general hospital is beginning to decline. For the district health authority as a whole lists rose much more slowly, increasing by 2·2 per cent. between March 1983 and March 1986. Nevertheless, this underlines the need for the drive to reduce excessive waiting lists and times which is being undertaken, supported by a special fund of £50 million over the two years 1987-88 and 1988-89. Basingstoke district health authority and Wessex regional health authority are already implementing ambitious plans to make improvements.

Patients on in-patient waiting list at 31 December

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*Change 1983-1985*	
	Number	*Number*	*Number*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Basingstoke and District (General Division)	2,142	2,445	2,724	582	+27·2

Mobility Allowance

40. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to review the existing regulations relating to mobility allowance.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 25 November 1986 at column *288*.

Doctors (Over-prescribing)

41. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action is taken against doctors who habitually over-prescribe drugs.

Mr. Newton: Subject to the requirements of the selected list scheme a general medical practitioner is required by his terms of service to prescribe whatever drugs he considers necessary for the treatment of his patients. Nevertheless, general medical practitioners whose prescribing costs are more than 25 per cent. above the average of colleagues in their area may be visited by doctors of the Department's regional medical service. Advice is given on how to modify prescribing habits without detriment to patient care.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has powers under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to deal with cases of irresponsible prescribing of controlled drugs.

Incontinence

42. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many incontinence pads were supplied to the National Health Service in each of the past 10 years; at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is for the local health authorities to decide policy on the provision of incontinence pads and other incontinence aids.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what initiatives his Department takes in advising medical schools to provide training for medical practitioners in the care of the incontinent; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if his Department will provide vocational courses on the control and care of incontinent persons for general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Under the helping the community to care programme, the Department is funding a project for the development, by the King's Fund, of an information and training pack for general practitioners, community nurses and other professional staff, on the management of incontinence in elderly people. The training materials, consisting of handbooks, videos and a pocket book, are to be launched in May 1987.

The content of undergraduate medical education is a matter for universities, within broad guidelines laid down

by the General Medical Council. Continuing education and vocational training for general practitioners in England is centrally funded by the Department, at the rate of nearly £2·5 million this year. The allocations are administered regionally by general practice educational sub-committees, who determine the content and nature of the educational activities. The Department intends to publicise the King's Fund training materials both to universities with medical schools and to the general practice educational sub-committees.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) to what extent he encourages the provision of district continence nurse advisers; what encouragement he gives for the development of such services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice, encouragement and guidance his Department gives for the establishment of walk-in or self-referral continence clinics; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that minimum acceptable standards of care for incontinent persons are available within each health board in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: It is for individual authorities to decide for themselves both the level of provision, and the pace and direction of further developments in their services, in the light of their local needs and circumstances.

We do, however, expect health authorities to provide appropriate services for incontinent people, and in 1977 the Department's chief nursing officer wrote to all health authorities advising them that the management of incontinence should be clearly identified as the responsibility of a designated special nurse, who should act as a "resource person" for nurses working in hospitals and the community services. Since then, most district health authorities have appointed at least one continence adviser. Community nurses also provide advice and assessment as part of their nursing duties.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what advice his Department gives to health authorities regarding the importance of medical-surgical management and nursing-care management of incontinent patients; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice he gives regarding the provision of continence advice and service; what information he has on variations in care of incontinent patients from one area to another; if he will write to each health authority concerning provision for the treatment of incontinence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Although data about incontinence services in particular districts are not routinely collected, information about these services is regularly included in the reports of the Health Advisory Service, and is also obtained informally by the Department's own officers.

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of the important contribution which the correct management of incontinence, and the provision of appropriate services, can make to enable those suffering from this distressing condition to obtain help and to remain in their own homes in the community.

A considerable amount of research, much of it funded by the Government, has been carried out into various aspects of incontinence. For example, the results of a study of incontinence pads and garments was published in October 1986 by the DHSS, Scottish Home and Health Department, Welsh Office and Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) in the "Health Equipment Information" series. In order to bring together the wide range of recently completed work, we are funding a research review by the Nursing Practice Research Unit at Surrey university. In order to disseminate the research results and to present options for the development of cost-effective services, we are to hold a seminar in February 1987 for service managers from health authorities and social services departments.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his estimate of the number of incontinence sufferers in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give an estimate of the number of male incontinent persons in the age bracket 15 to 64 and 65-plus years in England; if he will give the same estimates for females; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: An epidemiological survey conducted by the Medical Research Council's epidemiology and medical care unit between 1976 and 1979 covering a sample of the general population in England and Wales showed rates of prevalence of urinary incontinence per thousand of population as follows:

	Rate per thousand population
Males	
aged 15-64	16
aged 65 and over	69
Females	
aged 15-64	85
aged 65 and over	116

Using the 1980 population figures, this would give a total prevalence of adult incontinence in the community of the order of approximately 2½ million in the United Kingdom.

Radiotherapy

43. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what factors he takes into account in determining whether regional health authorities should be permitted to proceed with reorganisation of radiotherapy services into large regional centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The organisation of radiotherapy services in individual regions is a matter for regional health authorities. If, following public consultation, we are required to examine any specific proposal to which a community health council has objected, all relevant factors are taken into account including the results of that consultation.

Guidance to health authorities on the provision of radiotherapy services is set out in HC(78)32 and was confirmed in HN(84)23, which covered a report on acute services for cancer by an expert working group of the standing sub-committee on cancer of the Department's standing medical advisory committee, copies of which are in the Library.

Hospital Waiting Lists

44. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from general practitioners about the effect of the present length of waiting lists on their willingness to refer patients for hospital treatment.

Mr. Newton: We can trace no recent representations from general practitioners or their representatives on this specific point.

Housing Benefit

45. **Mr. Raynsford** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress in discussions between his Department and the local authority associations on the detailed arrangements for the housing benefit scheme changes effective from April 1988.

Mr. Lyell: Discussions with the local authority associations on the detailed structure of the new housing benefit scheme are nearing completion. Draft regulations have been issued for formal consultation.

Discussions on future subsidy arrangements are also in progress with the aim of reaching decisions on the basic framework as quickly as possible.

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the total number and percentage of home owners in Great Britain receiving rate rebates, including former supplementary benefit payments towards rates, in each of the years from 1979 to 1986, the total cost of such payments and the average payment per recipient.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1986, c. *693-94*]: Information relating to rate rebate expenditure on home owners is not available. Similarly information relating to the number of home owners receiving rate rebates before 1983 is not available. Estimates of the number of home owners receiving rate rebates from 1983 are as follows:

Year	*Average number of recipients (thousands)*	*Percentage of all home owners*
1983-84	2,540	20
1984-85	2,540	20
1985-86	2,440	18
1986-87	2,410	18

Note: The percentage of all home owners for 1986-87 is calculated using information on 1985 properties.

Medical Equipment

46. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to extend the range of medical equipment available under National Health Service prescription; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The approved list of appliances, dressings and chemical reagents which general medical practitioners may prescribe on the National Health Service is kept under constant review. Changes to the list are made in consultation with representatives of the medical and pharmaceutical professions, in the light of the changing needs of general practice, the extent of demand, availability and cost.

Nurse Education

47. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the cost to the National Health Service of introducing the current proposal of the United Kingdom Central Council for the restructuring of nurse education.

Mr. Newton: The United Kingdom Central Council's project 2000 report—"A New Preparation for Practice"—was issued as a consultation document. The UKCC is now preparing definitive proposals in the light of consultation and until these are published any estimate of cost could only be speculative.

Cancer Treatment

49. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will intervene in the review of cancer treatment facilities in the Thames health regions.

Mrs. Currie: The development of cancer treatment services is the responsibility primarily of the relevant regional and district health authorities, and special health authorities. Proposals to change existing patterns of services are usually referred to Ministers only if they are opposed by the local community health council.

Benefits

52. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the number of persons receiving supplementary or housing benefit and the number of such beneficiaries six years earlier.

Mr. Lyell: The information is as follows:

	Numbers of recipients (thousands)
Supplementary Benefit	
December 1985	4,587
November 1979	2,855
Housing Benefit	
Autumn 1985	[1]7,150
Autumn 1979 (England and Wales)	[2]2,684
April 1979 (Scotland)	[2]374

[1] Of these, 3,310,000 were also in receipt of supplementary benefit.
[2] Relates to the rate rebate scheme which preceded the present housing benefit scheme. The figures do not include supplementary benefit claimants receiving help with their rent and rates under that scheme.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the London borough of Newham have been in receipt of *(a)* supplementary benefit and *(b)* housing benefit in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Buildings (Solar Techniques and Technology)

53. **Mr. Freeson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what design guidance and requirements his Department is issuing to health authorities and others for new hospital and other health buildings and renovation work to encourage them to use passive solar techniques and technology.

Mrs. Currie: Advice on the orientation of health buildings and optimising window areas is included in

energy efficiency guidance issued to health authorities. The Department is also monitoring research on solar technology, including the use of atria and conservatories.

Cervical Smears

54. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to initiate methods of controlling the qualifications of staff engaged in private laboratories processing cervical smears and their standards of quality control.

Mrs. Currie: We would expect health authorities which use private laboratories to have due regard for the qualifications of staff employed and for standards of quality control. In addition to existing arrangements, discussions are taking place with relevant United Kingdom professional bodies on the introduction of voluntary external quality assurance schemes and on improvements to training and certification for non-medical laboratory staff. These would be relevant to all laboratories in which cervical smears are examined. Arrangements in Scotland are, of course, a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Pre-school Play Groups

Mr. Rathbone asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number and proportion of 3 to 4-year-olds going to pre-school play groups in the voluntary sector for each of the last five years.

Mrs. Currie: Statistics are not collected centrally in the form requested, but a rough estimate based on figures supplied by the Pre-School Playgroups Association would be that half the 3 to 4-year-olds attend. The table lists the number of playgroup places provided in England by the voluntary and private sectors taken together and the numbers of places per thousand population aged under five.

Year	*Places[1] (in thousands)*	*Places per thousand population aged under five[2]*
1982	364·8	131
1983	371·6	133
1984	384·9	133
1985	391·1	138
[3]1986	406·6	138

[1] The numbers of places are as at 31 March.
[2] The numbers of places per thousand population aged under five are based on the population as at 30 June of the previous year.
[3] The 1986 figures are provisional.

The information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland, and my right hon and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Transplant Organs

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on his discussions with Professor Michael Oliver on the possibility of amending the Human Tissue Act, so that hospital authorities can take the organs of those who have not opted out during their lifetime.

Mr. Newton: We are not aware of any such discussions having taken place.

Nurses' Welfare Service

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he has refused financial help for the Nurses' Welfare Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Nurses' Welfare Service is administered by a trust which is an autonomous voluntary body supported by charitable organisations, health authorities and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery, and Health Visiting. Power to provide grants from central funds is provided under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, but grants under this provision are not normally paid to organisations providing services which are limited to the employees of a particular profession with a distinct employer.

Medical Personnel (Emigration)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will initiate an urgent review of the extent and effects of the continued and increasing emigration of the top medical personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Some movement of doctors between countries, for instance to pursue postgraduate training and research, is to be expected. The available evidence suggests that the net outflow of United Kingdom medical graduates is substantially less than it was in the 1960s and 1970s. The evidence will be examined by the Second Advisory Committee on Medical Manpower Planning, which my right hon. Friend, in consultation with the other United Kingdom Health Ministers, has established to consider likely developments in the supply of, and demand for, medical manpower in the United Kingdom. We will be considering the implications in the light of the committee's advice.

National Association of Young People in Care

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in reaching a decision on the application by the National Association of Young People in Care for financial assistance over the next three years.

Mrs. Currie: The additional information referred to in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 October 1986, at column *127*, has now been received from the National Association of Young People in Care and is being considered. It is hoped that a decision on the association's application for grant-aid will be given soon.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why there is a shortage of supplies in hearing aid centres of National Health Service aids in the BE30's range; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Influenza Vaccine

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the effect on the voluntary price regulation scheme of doctors who buy 'flu vaccine at a 20 per cent. discount which is not shown on the invoices to be reimbursed by his Department.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, a person will be eligible for the severe disability premium if he uses that premium to meet the expenses of a volunteer living with him who is not under the auspices of a voluntary organisation;

(2) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, Column *705*, he will state what information he has on the range of charges currently being made by voluntary organisations providing volunteers to live with severely disabled people;

(3) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, he will state what is the number of the estimated 7,000 recipients of the severe disability premium who will be in receipt of the higher rate of attendance allowance;

(4) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, a person will be eligible for the severe disability premium if he uses that premium to pay for a person to live with him in order to provide the assistance he requires;

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why he has decided to offer the severe disability premium only to disabled people who live alone and are in receipt of attendance allowance but who are not cared for by a person claiming invalid care allowance;

(2) on what basis it has been decided that disabled people who are cared for by someone in receipt of invalid care allowance should not qualify for the severe disability premium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I shall let the right hon. members have replies as soon as possible.

Leicestershire District Health Authority

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the allocation of resources under the National Health Service to the Leicestershire district health authority.

Mr. Newton: Revenue expenditure in Leicestershire district health authority increased by 34 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1986-87, in part as a result of the continuing commitment to achieve a fairer distribution of National Health Service resources across the country. That process will continue. My right hon. Friend recently announced regional health authorities' resource allocations for 1987-88. I am pleased to confirm that the Trent regional health authority, of which Leicestershire is a part, will again receive a substantial increase in revenue resources, of 6·3 per cent. (over £55 million) in cash or 2·5 per cent. in real terms over 1986-87, bringing the total real terms increase since 1978-79 to 30 per cent. Allocation to districts are a matter for regional health authorities, but Leicestershire will undoubtedly benefit from the increased resources made available to Trent region.

Child Care Law

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now publish his proposals for the reform of child care law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: The welfare and protection of children is a matter of great concern to all of us, and it is important that the law reflects that concern. I am pleased to publish today our proposals for a major overhaul of child care law and also to propose measures to improve the safeguards where young children are being looked after by child minders or in other day-care facilities.

Our proposals take account of the recommendations of the working party on child care law and the many comments received on them as well as the views of those who commented on arrangements for children under five. They will offer a better service for families and protection of children at risk of harm.

The Government remain committed to introducing legislation as soon as parliamentary time can be found.

Pay Beds

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to introduce any changes to the system for setting pay bed charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Following extensive consultations, we have decided that the function of determining charges for private in-patients, private out-patients and amenity beds in National Health Service hospitals should be delegated to district and special health authorities. Regulations will be laid shortly to make this effective from 1 April 1987. Authorities will be able to choose whether to set their own charges, or to use rates produced centrally.

Those authorities which opt to set their own charges will be expected to do so to recover their costs, taking account of the recent recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts decisions on the level of the centrally produced rates which will take account of these recommendations will be announced in due course.

Guardians Ad Litem

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any local authorities have received extra funding to appoint guardians ad litem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Provision was made in the rate support grant settlement for 1984-85 based on expected costs discussed with representatives of the local authorities.

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, what information he has as to how long it takes guardians ad litem to be appointed after child care proceedings have been initiated; and how long it takes their reports to be provided to the courts.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Comprehensive information is not held centrally. However, a recent informal exercise conducted by the Department suggests that in more than half the areas the time taken to appoint guardians ad litem is up to one week. In a few cases a period of more than eight weeks elapses. Guardians are usually expected to present their reports to the court within six to eight weeks.

American Medical Students

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has, and what discussions have taken place, concerning the admission of American students from Caribbean universities to study medicine in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Medical students of overseas universities, the qualifications of which are recognised by the General Medical Council for purposes of registration in this country, may be granted facilities to do part of their clinical training in National Health Service hospitals. Health authorities are discouraged from providing access to clinical facilities for students of any medical schools not so recognised. Officials are considering with professional and academic interests the need for revised guidance on the conditions under which students may undertake clinical work in NHS hospitals.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by region all hospitals whose future closure has been approved, the year when it is likely to take effect, and the number of beds that will be lost in each case; and if he will provide similar data regarding future cuts in beds in hospitals which are not being fully closed.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: The information we routinely collect centrally relates to the timing of approval for permanent total or partial closure, or change of use, following public consultation. It does not specify the date when the closure or change of use is planned to take effect, nor does it contain details of any reprovision of services. Health authorities' future plans for permanent closures or substantial changes of use must be subject to public consultation before they can be approved.

For the information we keep centrally, up to August 1986, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 24 November 1986, at columns *143-46*.

Birth Statistics

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for the years 1982 to 1985 the estimated percentages of women delivering in *(a)* England and *(b)* England and Wales (i) whose labours were induced, (ii) whose labours were of spontaneous onset and (iii) who had elective caesarean sections.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 9 December 1986, c. *126*]: The information is shown in the table. Data for 1985 are not yet available.

Estimated percentages of women delivering by type of onset of labour 1982-84

Type of onset of labour	*Percentage of all deliveries*					
	(a) England			*(b) England and Wales*		
	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
(i) Induced	18·8	18·9	17·3	[1]95·3	[1]95·3	[1]95·3
(ii) Spontaneous onset of labour	76·6	76·5	78·0			
(iii) Elective caesarean section	4·6	4·6	4·6	4·7	4·7	4·7

Source: England Maternity HIPE; Wales HAA.
Percentages may not add to exactly 100 because of rounding.
[1] Aggregation reflects data available for Wales.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 January 1987

ENVIRONMENT

Fire Research Station

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the current staffing level of the Fire Research Station; and what were the numbers of staff in post on 1 June in each of the years 1984 to 1986 inclusive.

Mr. John Patten: There were 109 staff in post at the Fire Research Station on 1 December 1986. The numbers in post on 1 June 1984, 1985 and 1986 were 113½, 106 and 111 respectively.

Building Research

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the research or testing work carried out by *(a)* the Building Research Establishment and *(b)* The British Board of Agrément regarding cavity insulation, since the reply by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) on 6 June 1984.

Mr. John Patten: The Building Research Establishment has continued its research programme into the effectiveness and performance of cavity fill insulation. The research has assisted the preparation and publication of British standards which ensure that the insulants are correctly installed so that maximum thermal benefit may be achieved with minimum danger of rain penetration or ingress of any substances likely to cause irritation to the occupants. A survey of reported incidents of rain penetration of insulated cavity walls mainly in new private housing has been carried out with the collaboration of BEC, BBA and the NHBC. The provisional findings are being discussed with those who collaborated in the study and other interested organisations with a view to publishing a report of the study. Work continues on the effectiveness of water repellant treatments to the external wall in preventing rain penetration on the effect of the width of the cavity on the risk of rain penetration of insulated walls.

The British Board of Agrément continues to test and assess products and systems for cavity wall insulation. 41 agrément certificates for these have been issued since June 1984 here are currently 40 certificates valid for built-in full and partial-fill products, and 37 for injected systems.

The board has collaborated with the BRE and others in the recent survey of rain penetration of insulated cavity walls.

The BBA's surveillance scheme, by which the board monitors the quality of work done by approved installers of injected systems, was improved and extended in 1985, notably to increase checks on companies' methods of management and control of products used.

Hamilton Development (Leicester)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he held with the House Builders Federation on the proposed Hamilton development, prior to his approval for a modified development at Hamilton, north-east Leicester.

Mr. Tracey: The House Builders Federation took part in the examination in public of the alteration to the Leicestershire structure plan when this proposal was extensively discussed.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy concerning the construction of large council housing estates and how this policy was applied to the proposed Hamilton plan in Leicester.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: My right hon. Friend is against large new rented estates. He sees councils primarily as enablers rather than producers of housing, with a special responsibility for groups like the homeless whose needs the private sector cannot meet in full. Housing policies and proposals in development plans relate to the number and location of new dwellings. It is not part of their function to indicate whether the provision will be made by the public or the private sector.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what criterion he used in assessing the need for a large scale housing development at Hamilton in the Leicester, East constituency, and on what basis he considered such a development as "environmentally desirable".

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: Provision of land for housing in structure plans takes account of market demand and other housing requirements. The proposal for Hamilton is in accord with our policy that development should be directed towards urban locations and avoid increased pressure on environmentally sensistive small villages and rural areas.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the proposed new development at Hamilton, north-east Leicester.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: My right hon. Friend has received five representations in favour of the development and seven against it. Five other representations supported development in this location, but suggested that provision before 1996 should be reduced.

Mersey Barrage

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present position in respect of the proposed Mersey barrage scheme.

Mr. John Patten: The Merseyside Barrage Company was formed in February 1986 to foster joint participation from the public and private sectors.

A £700,000 study is to take place to investigate that there are no overriding impediments to the construction of the barrage and its preferred location.

The barrage is primarily an energy-based project. The Department of Energy is in the lead for the Government and has contributed £400,000 towards the cost of the feasibility study.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last had discussions with the chairman of the Merseyside Development Corporation; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. John Patten: I met Mr. Forster on 9 July 1986. The meeting was to discuss the corporation's progress in achieving the aims of its current corporate plan and to look forward to the preparation of the next.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Merseyside Development Corporation, stating their occupations, whether they are appointed in a full-time or part-time capacity and their remuneration in each case.

Mr. John Patten: The information held by the Department is as follows:

Mr. Donald Forster, Chairman
Retired chairman of the family textile company. Former Chairman of Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation.

Mr. John Smith, CBE, Deputy Chairman
Director of private manufacturing company. Chairman of Sports Council and Chairman of Liverpool Football Club.

Professor Graham Ashworth, CBE
Professor of Urban Environmental Studies, Salford University.

Dr. Noel Boaden
Dean of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies, Liverpool University.

Mr. Phillip Carter, CBE
Chairman, Everton Football Club. President, The Football League. Chairman, Merseyside Tourism Board. Chairman Designate of the Croxteth Hall Trust. Former Managing Director of Littlewoods Organisation plc.

Councillor Thomas Glover
Councillor Sefton Borough Council. Insurance Consultant.

Councillor John Hale
Councillor Wirral Borough Council. Public Finance Accountant with the North West Water Authority.

Mr. John Leighton Boyce
Director of Pilkingtons, National Westminster Bank plc and County Banks Ltd.

Mr. Clive Lewis
Senior Partner of Clive Lewis and Partners, Surveyors. Member of the Executive Committee of FIABCA (International Real Estate Federation). Member of the 1987 International Year of Shelter for the Homeless Council.

Dr. John Ritchie
Chief Executive of the Corporation.

Members are required to notify the Department of changes in occupation only if there is a possiblity of conflict of interest; this therefore is not necessarily a complete description of members' occupations at the present time. Members are appointed in a part-time capacity. The chairman works two days per week, the deputy chairman one day per week and members half a day per week. The current salaries are £17,406, £5,907 and £3,465 per annum respectively.

Merseyside Residuary Body

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last held discussions with the chairman of the Merseyside residuary body; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not held any discussions with the chairman of the Merseyside residuary body, but my noble Friend met the chairman on 16 December at Croxteth hall for the purposes outlined in the answer given to the hon. Member on 16 December by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave). I met Mr. Brodrick on 23 October at a meeting with the residuary body chairmen at which matters concerning the residuary bodies' functions in general were discussed. These included staff, property, finance and progress towards wind-up.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Merseyside residuary body, stating their occupations, whether they are appointed in a full or part-time capacity and their remuneration in each case.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Name	*Occupation*	*Day per week*	*Remuneration* £
Norman Brodrick (Chairman)	Ex-Local agent, Bank of England	2	18,198
Duncan Forbes	Ex-Managing Director, Booker Line	1	5,830
John Hill	Ex-Treasurer, Liverpool City Council	1	5,830
Bill Hughes	Ex-Director of Personnel and Management Services Wirral MBC	1	5,830
Leslie Jones	Ex-Superintending Estates Officer DOE	1	5,830
Kenneth Medlock	Vice Chairman, Merseyside Chamber of Commerce and Industry	1	5,830
Barrie Marsh	Solicitor, Chairman of Liverpool Chamber of Commerce	1	5,830
Philip Carter	Ex-Managing Director, Littlewoods Organisation, Chairman, Everton Football Club	1	5,830

Rivers (Pollution)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to combat pollution in the river Soar.

Mr. Waldegrave: The responsibility for controlling pollution of the river Soar lies with the Severn Trent water authority. As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Member on 17 December 1986, at column 580, I am satisfied that the powers available to water authorities are generally adequate for dealing with pollution of rivers.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to reduce pollution in British rivers since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: The main provisions of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 have been progressively implemented since July 1984. The Act provides comprehensive controls over discharge to rivers.

Reema Houses

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Building Research Establishment to complete the investigation into the Reema type of prefabricated reinforced concrete house.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on his Department's public expenditure plans, following publication of the White Paper setting out the Government's expenditure plans 1987-88 to 1989-90.

Mr. Ridley: The White Paper amplifies my Department's plans for expenditure in 1987-88 to 1989-90, announced in summary at the time of the autumn statement. It also contains a wealth of information about what we have achieved through our programmes in past years, and about our targets for the future.

Housing: £450 million extra for 1987-88

Gross capital provision for housing for 1987-88 is £3,661 million. This is £451 million more than previously planned, and £225 million more than expected outturn for 1986-87. Resources for Estate Action (the urban housing renewal unit) have been increased by 50 per cent. to £75 million. This will enable the unit to build on its success in developing, in conjunction with local authorities, innovative approaches to dealing with the problems of rundown estates. In 1986-87 the unit is supporting over 100 schemes, involving more than 55,000 dwellings, in 40 different authorities. In 1987-88 Estate Action expects to support 150 schemes, invloving over 82,000 dwellings.

The Housing Corporation's approved development plan for 1987-88 is £705 million, a £20 million increase over its gross provision this year. This will allow the corporation to approve some 22,000 new housing association houses for rent and for sale—a 21 per cent. increase over 1986-87. The additional £20 million is provided specifically for new schemes mixing 30 per cent. HAG and private finance. Together with a further £10 million from within the programme, mixed finance schemes should generate £100 million of new housing investment by housing associations.

Urban Development Corporation: new UDCs to be set up

At £126 million, provision for 1987-88 is increased by £40 million over previous plans. £15 million of this is provided to start up the proposed new UDCs — in Trafford Park, Teeside, Tyne and Wear and the Black Country in the west midlands.

The success of the London Docklands Development Corporation continues. £1·5 billion of private investment commitments have so far been attracted to the London Docklands Development Corporation's area: 300 companies have moved into docklands, 8,000 new jobs have been provided, and nearly 10,000 private homes have been commenced or completed since the establishment of the corporation in 1981. The increased public expenditure provision for UDCs will enable LDDC to boost the pace of regeneration still further.

On Merseyside, the UDC expects to have reclaimed 146 hectares of land for housing, commercial and recreational use by March 1987, and to have achieved 946 permanent and 700 temporary new jobs. Priorities for next year include the completion of the Albert docks development and of the South docks infrastructure work.

Urban Programme and Derelict Land — continuing support

Our plans for 1987-88 include provision of £324 million for the urban programme and £81 million for the derelict land reclamation programme. These figures are respectively an increase of £7 million and £3 million over initial provision for the current year. The urban development grant programme will continue as part of the urban programme, and the new urban regeneration grant will be also available to support private-sector-led regeneration activity on difficult sites in urban areas.

New Towns

The primary objective of the corporations is to round off development of their towns. New investment on non-housing services is mainly directed at completing the physical infrastructure and facilitating the provision of employment opportunities with a maximum level of private investment. Receipts obtained by new town bodies (mainly from the sale of industrial and commercial assets) now exceed gross expenditure and are continuing to grow. The gross capital provision on other environmental services has been set at £36 million for 1987-88, with expected receipts of almost £150 million.

Heritage: A period of consolidation

At £114 million, provision for the heritage programmes in 1987-88 is £75 million over provision for the current year. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission receives an additional £2 million mainly to strengthen its cost-effective programme of repair grants to the private sector, including churches.

Nature Conservation: more resources

The Countryside Commission's grant-in-aid will rise from £17·7 million this year to £19·5 million in 1987-88, representing a 61 per cent. increase in real terms since 1979. This latest increase will enable the commission to press ahead with its programme for improving access to the countryside, providing conservation advice to farmers, landowners and voluntary groups and encouraging increased cost-effective activity in the voluntary sector. Targets for the expanded grant programme include the planting of 2 million trees and the establishment of five new groundwork trusts.

12. The Nature Conservancy Council's grant rises from £32 million this year to £36·5 million in 1987-88. This year the council will reach its target of re-notifying 80 per cent. of the sites of special scientific interest in Britain, and it has enabled me to designate Britain's first statutory marine nature reserve, on Lundy Island. Priorities for next year will be to protect more sites and to improve the council's research and monitoring capacity.

Water: Continued Improvements in Efficiency

Water authorities operating efficiency continues to improve without any detrimental effect on service standards. Under performance aims set by the Government, real terms operating costs have reduced by 6·2 per cent. since 1982-83. Further aims will be set for the three years to 1989-90.

The increased volume of investment achieved in the current year will be maintained in 1987-88 with further increases in 1988-89 and 1989-90. This will make for

continued improvements in services, water quality and environmental standards. In 1987-88 water charges will increase by under 6 per cent. on average. No authority should need to increase its charges by more than 7 per cent.

Local Authority Capital Expenditure: £700 million extra for 1987-88

Gross provision for capital expenditure on the main local authority services is increased by about £700 million, from the previously planned level, to just under £5,000 million. Allocations total over £2,600 million. The prescribed proportions of capital receipts, which can be used to supplement allocations are maintained: spending power from this is estimated in the White Paper to increase to about £2,800 million next year.

I announced on 15 October that we will not be carrying out a major reform of the control of local authority capital expenditure in the present Session of Parliament. Instead we propose to consider the reform of the present system alongside the rest of the proposals in the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government".

Local authority current expenditure: £3·38 billion more

Local authority public expenditure provision relevant for Exchequer grants in 1987-88 is increased by £3·38 billion over previous provision. This includes £460 million which is dependent on the Government's requirements on pay structure and duties being met in a teachers' pay settlement.

Newham

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North West): To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the housing investment programme allocation for the London borough of Newham for each of the last five years.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply 13 January 1987*]: The housing investment programme allocations for the London borough of Newham for each of the last five years are given in the table:

	Allocations £m	*Expenditure £m*
1986-87	21·699	[1]47,224
1985-86	21·574	28·849
1984-85	23·310	40·979
1983-84	20·361	33·238
1982-83	22·162	17·542

[1] Estimated.

Since 1981-82 local authorities have, in addition to their HIP allocations, been able to increase their capital spending power by a prescribed proportion of their receipts from sales of assets, including council houses. The table therefore also gives, for comparison, Newham's total capital expenditure on housing in those years.

Agricultural Buildings and Works

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, *Official Report*, 17 December, column *592*, he will indicate the clarification he has given in reply to the representations received about his proposals to extend planning controls to new livestock building and associated structures.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: I shall write to the hon. Member.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Refugee-related Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the £5 million pledged by Her Majesty's Government to cover refugee-related infrastructure projects has already been disbursed within the ICARA II framework; on what projects; and whether he intends to commit further resources to such refugee-related infrastructure projects.

Mr. Chris Patten: Of the £2.3 million committed to date, some £1.3 million has already been disbursed.

Eighteen projects have been supported in the fields of agricultural development, community development, small-scale industries and income-generation, primary education, adult education and water supply. Countries assisted include Sudan, Rwanda, Chad, Somalia, Botswana, Guinea (Conakry) and Zimbabwe.

Efforts are being made to accelerate commitments under the £5 million pledge. I shall review the situation when the pledge has been fully committed.

WALES

Land Authority

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make a statement on the progress of the Land Authority for Wales since 20 June 1984.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: During the financial year ending 31 March 1986 the Land Authority acquired about 128 hectares (317 acres) of land and disposed of about 69 hectares (171 acres) for residential, industrial and commercial purposes. Its land bank consisted of about 533 hectares (1,317 acres). About £5.9 million was spent on acquisition of land and provision of infrastructure, and income was about £5.0 million. The net profit for the year was £0.9 million and accumulated profits some £5 million. The authority's net worth at 31 March 1986 stood at some £12.8 million. Annual review reports updating the housing land availability studies have been published for the counties of Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwent and Mid, South and West Glamorgan.

We are satisfied that the Land Authority for Wales has continued to play a valuable role in facilitating economic development in Wales. It is particularly noteworthy that during this period the authority was instrumental in bringing about the first phase of the redevelopment of south Cardiff.

EMPLOYMENT

Restart Scheme

Mr. Marlow asked the Paymaster General what are the latest figures, expressed as numbers and percentage by region, for *(a)* the numbers of restart letters sent out, *(b)* the numbers of second letters sent out, *(c)* the numbers who have been sent letters out but not yet attended interviews and *(d)* the numbers who have left the register (i) without any response to the programme and (ii) subsequent to interview and counselling.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

YTS

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General whether the Government's undertaking that all unemployed minimum age school leavers would be offered a suitable two-year place in YTS by Christmas 1986 has been met; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am very pleased to say that the Government's undertaking has been effectively met in this the first year of two-year YTS as it was in the three years during which the one-year youth training scheme was in operation. There are around 347,000 trainees currently on YTS and on 5 January only 2,376 young people were waiting for the offer of a place. The comparable figures for 1985, 1984 and 1983 were 2,290, 3,853 and 4,320 respectively.

Young people have been quick to grasp the opportunities which two-year YTS affords them to obtain high quality training leading to recognised vocational qualifications. The fact that we are now able to guarantee all unemployed minimum age school leavers the offer of a two-year place is a tremendous achievement and a great credit to the Manpower Services Commission and all others involved.

Training Schemes

Mr. Dobson asked the Paymaster General what was the total of people on Department of Employment schemes in Greater London in 1978 and in each year since; and how many of these were aged *(a)* 16 to 17, *(b)* 17 to 18, *(c)* 18 to 19 and *(d)* 19 to 20 years.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: It is not possible to give precise total figures because of the various bases on which local information is collected.

Almost all the employment, training and enterprise measures run by the Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission provide opportunities for young people, but a breakdown showing the numbers of young people benefiting from the schemes in the form requested is available only at disproportionate cost. Some of the schemes, however, are aimed specifically at young people. These are YTS, community industry and the new workers scheme, which are currently operating; previous schemes for young people which we were operating during this period but which have now closed were the youth opportunities programme and the young workers scheme.

The number of people who have participated in the training opportunities programme, the youth training scheme, community industry, adult training, the enterprise allowance scheme, voluntary projects programme, the special temporary employment programme, the community enterprise programme, the community programme and the temporary short-time working compensation scheme in Greater London are as follows with figures for the schemes aimed specifically at young people shown separately.

			YOP/YTS and CI
1978	5,522	including	5,292
1979	9,658	including	6,652
1980	39,792	including	11,397
1981	41,759	including	20,369
1982	31,622	including	17,341
1983	49,802	including	22,722
1984	59,378	including	24,588
1985	71,869	including	24,371
1986	77,748	including	18,665

In addition, in London and the south-east the following numbers of people were participating in the job release scheme, and job splitting scheme, the young workers scheme and the new workers scheme.

			YWS/NWS
1978	4,319	including	—
1979	14,425	including	—
1980	14,506	including	—
1981	11,719	including	—
1982	53,887	including	36,758
1983	53,350	including	33,629
1984	33,624	including	16,158
1985	20,351	including	10,379
1986	11,387	including	6,405

YWS was not introduced until 1982. The temporary employment subsidy was also operating during this period, but the number of people participating in the scheme in Greater London and the south-east is available only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister if, further to her answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South on 8 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *28*, she will state the response of Her Majesty's Government to the requirements to impose value added tax on civil engineering and construction (other than domestic housing), industrial fuels, and news services; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I can assure the hon. Member that the European Commission's challenge on all the goods and services in the zero rate case is being strenuously contested by Her Majesty's Government.

Fishing Industry

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Prime Minister if she will review co-ordination between the Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with respect to decisions on the approval sought for the Russian Klondyker vessels to tranship mackerel in Falmouth Bay, in view of the effects of the delay on the Scottish fishing fleet; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Security considerations must be taken fully into account in deciding on the stationing of east European factory vessels for trans-shipping purposes in United Kingdom ports. I am satisfied with arrangements for consultation between the Fisheries Departments and the Ministry of Defence on this matter.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Theft

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal how many cases of theft from hon. Members' and hon. Members' secretaries' offices were reported to the head of security in

1986; in how many cases the culprits were identified; how many people were removed from employment within the Palace of Westminster as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: Eight cases of theft from hon. Members' and hon. Members' secretaries' offices were reported to the head of security in 1986. The culprits have not yet been identified, but investigations are continuing.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will review the security measures taken to prevent theft from hon. Members' and hon. Members' secretaries' offices in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The security measures which are taken in the Palace of Westminster are kept continually under review.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Procurator Fiscal, Kilmarnock

Mr. Lambie asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland when he next plans to vist the procurator fiscal's office is Kilmarnock.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I expect to visit the procurator fiscal's office in Kilmarnock on 30 January 1987.

Legal Aid

44. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the Sheriff Principal to discuss the effects of cases of refusal of legal aid.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have no such plans.

High Court, Glasgow

46. **Mr. Fairbairn** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many cases were prosecuted in the High Court in Glasgow in the last year for which figures are available.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: In 1986 approximately 384 cases were indicted or adjourned into 25 sittings of the High Court in Glasgow. Of that number, 92 cases are recorded as pleas of guilty and 205 as having gone to trial. The balance comprises cases which were not called, deserted, adjourned or in which the accused failed to appear.

Tobacco Products (Under-age Sales)

48. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland whether there have been any prosecutions for the sale of tobacco products to children in the last 12 months.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: These statistics are not available.

TRANSPORT

A46-A47 Link Road

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport why he gave approval to the A46-A47 link road in east Leicester; what representations he received against the scheme; and if he will provide a breakdown by party.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The A46-A47 link road is the responsibility of Leicestershire county council, the highway authority. The scheme was accepted for transport supplementary grant in the 1985-86 financial year in recognition of its more than local traffic importance. The grant enables county councils to plan and finance major schemes. Acceptance for grant does not imply any views on the detailed aspects of any statutory orders which may still be necessary for the scheme.

The link road was included in the approved county structure plan after the examination in public in 1979. We cannot now identify individual objectors. I understand the link was not specifically mentioned in the list of matters examined or the ensuing report of the panel.

Car Parking

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now implement section 7 of the Road Traffic Act 1974, to ban car parking on footways, verges and central reservations in urban areas.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department has today published a discussion paper which looks at the reasons for pavement parking and the problems it causes. It puts forward various options for tackling the problem and invites interested bodies to comment. The Department has also produced a leaflet summarising the discussion paper which will be made available to the general public. Copies of the discussion paper and leaflet have been placed in the Library.

Driving Tests

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport what his plans are to improve the ability of his Driver Testing and Training Organisation to respond quickly and cost effectively to demand for driving tests.

Mr. Moore: From 1 April 1987 the Driver Testing and Training Organisation will be treated as a central Government trading body for the purposes of public expenditure and national accounting. This arrangement means that direct current expenditure by DTT will no longer count as public expenditure or against the gross running cost limits of the Department on the Transport Services and Central Administration Vote (VIII. 2.) Similarly, its fee receipts will no longer be an offset against public expenditure totals. In future, DTT's expenditure (including an assessed charge for general support still provided from the Department of Transport) and the associated fee receipts, will be brought to account on the non-cash limited Transport Industries Vote (VIII. 3).

The new arrangement will enable DTT to respond more quickly than in the past to changes in demand for tests and therefore to improve the service to the public. DTT's activities will be subject to unit cost targets consistent with efficient and effective use of resources and the recovery of its costs in fees.

Accordingly the costs and fee income of the DTT organisation are omitted from this year's public expenditure White Paper, published today. I shall arrange for DTT to produce an annual report and accounts after each financial year, which will be laid in the House of Commons Library.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

In-service Staff Development

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department's circular 6/86 is intended to fund in-service staff development; and what steps he will take to ensure that no sector is excluded from an adequate share in terms of in-service staff development.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The arrangements for grant-aid set out in the circular encourage local authorities to promote the training of teachers, educational psychologists, youth and community workers and education inspectors and advisers in a more systematic and purposeful way. Local authorities are required to address the needs of each of these groups in their locality in the training proposals on which grant-aid is based.

Research Activities

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to encourage greater concentration and selectivity of research activities.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is advised on the distribution of funds for research by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, and the University Grants Committee, and he has encouraged these bodies to adopt an increasingly selective approach. Progress has been achieved through the major restructuring being undertaken by research councils, including the rationalisation of sites, and re-ordering of scientific priorities; and through the more selective procedures adopted by the UGC in its distribution of research funds. The ABRC will further address the question of selectivity and concentration, in consultation with the UGC, in the strategy document it is preparing which will form part of its advice to my right hon. Friend in the spring of this year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Chinese Refugees

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many political refugees from China are now living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the numbers of Chinese nationals granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom in the years 1979 to 1985 are given in table 1 and 5A to 5F of Home Office Statistical Bulletin, "Refugee Statistics, United Kingdom 1985" (issue 12/86).

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have made application to be considered as political refugees from China in the last year.

Mr. Waddington: Provisional information indicates that one Chinese national made an application to be considered as a refugee in the 12 months ending 30 September 1986.

Prison Chapels

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what purposes prison chapels may be used other than for religious services and acts of worship;

(2) how many prison chapels are dedicated for exclusive use as places of worship;

(3) what is his policy regarding the use of prison chapels as cinemas for inmates;

(4) if he is satisfied that Pentonville prison chapel is being properly used by staff and inmates.

Mr. Mellor: All prison chapels are dedicated as places of worship to be used primarily for acts of worship and religious services. The few Roman Catholic chapels where there is the Reserved Sacrament may be used only for religious purposes. Apart from these chapels a prison chapel may have wider uses, provided that due regard and respect are had for its primary religious purpose. Alternative uses of this kind include staff and offical meetings, seminars, exhibitions, concerts and training groups for inmates in circumstances where alternative accommodation of a suitable size is not available.

In a few establishments, including Pentonville, it has been necessary to use the chapel as a cinema because of the lack of an alternative venue for this purpose. I have no reason to believe that improper use is being made of chapels by staff or inmates either at Pentonville or elsewhere.

Prisons (Films)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given for the selection and showing of films in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Now that the Video Recordings Act 1984 has come into force, advice will be given to governors on its implication for the selection and showing of films in prisons.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Management Training (Exhibition)

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Export Management Training to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Channon: Arrangements have been made for such an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall to take place from Monday 26 January to Friday 30 January 1987.

Rover Group

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Rover Group corporate plan, indicating what extra financial assistance he proposes to offer to ensure its successful implementation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Rover Group 1987 corporate plan was delivered to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 22 December 1986 and is now being considered. Once that process of consideration

is complete my right hon. Friend will announce the Government's response. Until then it would be inappropriate to comment on any aspect of the plan's content.

Guinness plc

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will call for an interim report from the inspectors appointed to investigate the affairs of Guinness.

Mr. Howard: No. I have consulted the inspectors, who agree that preparation of an interim report at this stage would impede their investigation. This question, will, however, be kept under review.

Mr. Geoffrey Collier

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the report he has received from the inspectors appointed under the Financial Services Act to investigate share dealing by Mr. Geoffrey Collier.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend does not propose to publish reports by inspectors appointed under section 177 of the Financial Services Act. Such reports are akin to reports made by the police to the Director of Public Prosecutions rather than to reports by inspectors appointed under the Companies Act. Their purpose is to advise my right hon. Friend whether any individual appears to have contravened the Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act, and to assist him in deciding whether to institute criminal proceedings. If an individual is prosecuted the substance of the inspectors' report will be disclosed in open court. Conversely, individuals who are not prosecuted are entitled to have their involvement in an investigation kept confidential.

Condoms

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with existing competition in the condom market; what is the current market share of the major producers; how many recent requests he has had to refer this situation to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The supply of contraceptive sheaths was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation in 1972 and 1981. The MMC concluded in its second report that a monopoly situation existed in favour of LRC Products Ltd. (now the London International Group) by virtue of the company's United Kingdom market share, estimated at between 90 and 95 per cent. As a result, LRC Products Ltd. gave undertakings in 1983 to limit price increases by relation to an index of its costs. These undertakings, which are still in force, are being closely monitored by the Director General of Fair Trading.

The Director General of Fair Trading has powers under the Fair Trading Act 1973 to make a further reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission if he considers it necessary.

Industry (Incentives)

Mr. Brandon Bravo asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are Her Majesty's Government's plans for expenditure on incentives to industry in the assisted areas in 1987-88.

Mr. Channon: The present public expenditure provision for regional incentives in 1987-88 is £419 million, an increase of 9 per cent., that is £36 million, on the provision contained in last year's public expenditure White Paper. Within this increased provision it has been decided that payment of grant on new applications under the new RDG scheme, RDG II, will be made two months after a claim has been approved. This will help to ensure that expenditure on regional incentives stays within 1987-88 public expenditure plans. Grants under the old RDG scheme, RDG I, will continue to be paid four months after claims have been approved.

Companies Act Investigations

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* investigations under the Companies Act initiated in the past 10 years stating *(a)* the date when inspectors were appointed, *(b)* the date of any interim report and *(c)* the date of their final report, if received, to date.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EC Industrial Council

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress made at the December European Community Council of Industry Ministers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The last Industrial Council of the United Kingdom presidency met under my chairmanship on 22 December. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry represented the United Kingdom.

The Council approved a new directive on state aid to shipbuilding to replace the fifth directive, which expired on 31 December 1986.

Under the new directive, which is to last four years, all subsidies that influence shipbuilding decisions will now have to be disclosed and they will be subject to a common maximum ceiling.

For the first 12 months, the Commission has set the ceiling at 28 per cent. of cost, that is 28 per cent. of the value of contract before aid. Assistance at this level represents 39 per cent. of the resulting contract price. This compares with the maximum limit on production aid of 18·4 per cent. of cost and 22½ per cent. on price available to United Kingdom shipbuilders under the fifth directive. The directive requires the Commission to make arrangements so that the level of aid provided for small ships, those costing less than 6 million ecu, where the impact of international competition from beyond the Community is least severe, will not exceed 20 per cent. of cost, or 25 per cent. of the resulting price.

The total amount of operating support a yard can receive over the course of a year, including compensation for losses as well as contract support, is also subject to the ceiling. In addition, the directive also permits in certain circumstances aid for investment, research and development, and closure. This support falls outside the ceiling.

Spain and Portugal will benefit from transitional arrangements which will exempt them from the common ceiling, though they will be obliged to compete fairly with other member states on individual contracts.

The directive represents a considerable improvement on the previous arrangements, both as regards the inclusion of all relevant subsidies, and the maximum level of subsidy permitted. We now have a directive which gives both an opportunity and an incentive to the European merchant shipbuilding industry to compete against the far east.

The Council also agreed three proposals in the Community's action programme for completing the internal market. They cover improvements to the EC supplies directives, specifying rules for the award of public sector supplies contracts; rules on the use of European standards for public purchases of IT and telecommunications equipment; and noise limits for hydraulic diggers and excavators. These three measures concluded the package of 13 measures discussed at the Internal Market Council on 1 December and, as a result, the number of internal market measures agreed or adopted during the United Kingdom presidency amounted to 48. This represents a substantial acceleration of progress towards the completion of the internal market by 1991.

In addition, the Council agreed a programme of further work aimed at opening up public procurement in the Community, and adopted a regulation for a 1987 tariff quota for Canary Islands cigars and cigarettes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Oleg Gordievsky

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received from relatives of Ivan Oleg Gordievsky about his detention in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Renton: It is not our practice to comment on security matters.

NATO Information Service

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much is being spent on *(a)* the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation information service in the current year, and *(b)* how much of this is the United Kingdom's contribution; what was the comparable figure in 1976; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The figures are:

	1986	*1976*
Total Budget	Belgian Francs 143 million (£2·42 million)	Belgian Francs 65 million (£823,000)
United Kingdom contribution	Belgian Francs 26·9 million (£456,000 or 18·82 per cent.)	Belgian Francs 12·6 million (£160,000 or 19·5 per cent.)

It is important that information about NATO, which is and will continue to be the bedrock of Western security, should be widely disseminated. We fully support the efforts of the NATO information service to this end.

Council of Ministers (Presidency)

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer to my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) on 19 December 1986 at columns 761-62.

Australia

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Australia following the Wright case.

Mr. Eggar: Our relations remain excellent.

Colonial Prisoners

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many convicted criminals and criminally insane are currently held under the provisions of the Colonial Prisoners Removal Acts; where they were removed from; and where they are now held.

Mr. Eggar: There are no convicted criminals or criminally insane persons held in any dependent territory under the Colonial Prisoners Removal Acts.

There are six prisoners convicted of offences in British dependent territories who are serving sentence in the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Colonial Prisoners Removal Acts at the request of the authorities of the territory where the prisoner was sentenced. All but one of these cases, which is under consideration, are held here at the expence of the territory concerned. Two of the prisoners are from St. Helena, one from the British Indian Ocean Territory, two from Bermuda and one from the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Additionally, there are a small number of persons normally resident in the United Kingdom who have been convicted of crimes in the dependent territories and transferred to this country under the Acts to serve their sentences, but there is no central record of such transfers.

Grants

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which organisations funded by his Department, other than the United Nations Association, have not had their grant increased in the past five years.

Mr. Eggar: Apart from the UNA, other organisations receiving funds from the diplomatic wing of the FCO which have not had their grant increased in the past five years are:

British Commonwealth Ex-Servicemen's League
College of Europe
South African War Graves Commission

Diplomats (Parking Fines)

Mr Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to the answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, columns *446-50*, he will publish figures showing for each of the last five years, in alphabetical order by country, the number of unpaid parking fines incurred by each diplomatic mission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Details of the total number of fixed penalty notices cancelled on the ground of diplomatic immunity for the years 1981, 1982 and 1983 were given to my hon.

Friend by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), on 13 February 1985, at column *193*. The table gives the details for the years 1984, 1985 and the first three quarters of 1986 (the latest figures available). These figures are based on information received up to 8 January 1987 and may be further reduced by late payments. We welcome the very significant downward trend and expect the holders of diplomatic immunity to continue it in the future.

Fixed Penalty Notices Cancelled on Grounds of Diplomatic Immunity (Metropolitan Police District)

Organisation/Country	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*[1]
Afghanistan	11	20	10
Algeria	932	939	226
Antigua and Barbuda	17	0	0
Australia	2	0	0
Austria	51	46	23
Bahamas	21	13	5
Bahrain	644	621	8
Bangladesh	404	242	152
Barbados	319	203	194
Belgium	154	51	40
Bolivia	71	19	3
Botswana	62	15	14
Brazil	4,927	1,558	134
Brunei	86	163	110
Bulgaria	2,823	1,932	235
Burma	407	306	77
Cameroon	1,293	952	471
Canada	132	232	125
Chile	610	301	105
China	1,132	763	616
Colombia	553	197	20
Costa Rica	471	376	37
Cuba	2,147	1,018	39
Cyprus	2,698	782	70
Czechoslavakia	316	138	42
Denmark	1	1	1
Dominica, Commonwealth of	22	0	1
Dominican Republic	45	0	0
Eastern Caribbean State	28	19	13
Ecuador	304	144	47
Egypt	6,885	3,618	650
El Salvador	9	11	27
Ethiopia	530	184	65
Fiji	93	59	19
Finland	580	327	145
France	2,375	1,390	808
Gabon	343	195	104
Gambia	362	274	145
German Democratic Republic	198	329	199
Germany, Federal Republic of	226	132	99
Ghana	2,223	1,216	306
Greece	1,321	973	229
Grenada	5	2	0
Guyana	193	137	33
Haiti	0	2	1
Holy See	0	0	0
Honduras	142	298	19
Hungary	1,456	955	85
Iceland	154	91	33
India	512	395	211
Indonesia	2,232	1,056	182
Iran	894	785	253
Iraq	2,783	1,936	548
Ireland, Republic of	755	453	153
Israel	282	194	149
Italy	2,981	1,381	308
Ivory Coast	911	393	155
Jamaica	1,446	671	45
Japan	2,378	825	203
Jordan	2,595	1,809	344
Kenya	1,739	1,415	99
Korea	218	92	190
Kuwait	996	468	225
Lebanon	73	42	24
Lesotho	69	103	44
Liberia	177	113	22
Libya	764	—	—
Luxembourg	2	0	1
Malawi	119	117	7
Malaysia	2,440	1,579	552
Malta, Republic of	564	234	33
Mauritius	176	95	45
Mexico	467	230	127
Monaco	2	—	—
Mongolia	12	10	5
Morocco	1,248	610	315
Nepal	67	39	24
Netherlands	33	17	9
New Zealand	1	0	0
Nicaragua	27	61	17
Nigeria, Federal Republic of	5,920	2,476	719
Norway	91	74	49
Oman	1,155	574	401
Pakistan	2,249	1,107	329
Panama	329	152	17
Papua New Guinea	18	6	7
Paraguay	270	102	65
Peru	690	417	169
Philippines	466	351	103
Poland	2,463	1,230	315
Portugal	969	661	224
Qatar	1,727	397	552
Romania	484	312	82
Saudi Arabia	4,956	2,111	1,021
Senegal	355	231	24
Seychelles	17	14	9
Sierra Leone	437	302	105
Singapore	87	24	9
Somali Democratic Republic	325	103	77
South Africa, Republic of	25	15	12
Soviet Union	1,555	1,124	518
Spain	1,513	883	347
Sri Lanka	588	352	86
Sudan	2,635	1,281	491
Swaziland	21	11	14
Sweden	196	62	56
Switzerland	50	10	2
Syria Arab Republic	980	557	164
Tanzania	1,033	701	78
Thailand	1,637	957	254
Togo	99	64	54
Tonga	10	3	1
Trinidad and Tobago	164	124	48
Tunisia	355	285	153

Organisation/Country	1984	1985	1986[1]
Turkey	1,263	1,001	827
Uganda	1,906	1,100	156
United Arab Emirates	1,693	1,081	366
United States of America	223	174	74
Uruguay	438	313	87
Venezuela	793	380	247
Vietnam	7	8	2
Yemen Arab Republic	226	54	26
Yemen, People's Democratic Republic	370	210	65
Yugoslavia	1,061	473	55
Zaire	257	186	55
Zambia	953	426	162
Zimbabwe	666	585	101
Commonwealth Secretariat	212	171	119
EEC Commission	7	5	3
International Cocoa Organisation	1	2	2
International Coffee Organisation	1	4	1
International Sugar Organisation	0	2	0
Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation	31	16	7
International Maritime Satellite Organisation	3	2	1
Western European Union	3	4	7
United Nations	6	2	1
TOTAL	108,932	59,639	18,994

[1] 1 January-30 September.

Entry Visas (Ghana)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the waiting time for the issue of entry visas from Ghana at the latest date.

Mr. Eggar: For business men and other regular visitors to the United Kingdom entry clearances, including multiple entry visas valid for two years, are normally granted within two days. For visitors who need a short interview the waiting time is currently two weeks. Applicants for settlement are normally interviewed within one month.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current waiting list for the issue of entry visas from Ghana and the figure over the past five years.

Mr. Eggar: As at 31 December 1986, 200 people were awaiting interview, 190 applications for visit visas and 10 for settlement.

Over the five years to 22 October 1986, during which period most visitors travelled without entry clearances, the waiting time was normally two or three days extending up to two weeks during the summer season. Settlement applicants during this period were invariable interviewed within one month.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to reduce the waiting list for entry visas from Ghana; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The current two weeks waiting time for the minority of visitors who need an interview is a result of the days lost during the Christmas and new year holidays and the move to the new high commission premises which took place in December. The complement of entry clearance officers was increased from two to three last month and the high commission expects to be able to reduce the waiting time to five days by the end of January.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Benefits

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the figures for the last five available years (i) on the number of claimants who have received disablement benefit for the prescribed industrial disease C23, primary neoplasm, including papilloma, carcinoma in situ and invasive carcinoma, of the epithelial lining of the urinary tract, renal pelvis, ureter, bladder and urethra and (ii) on the number of claimants receiving such benefits who were employed in the printing industry.

Mr. Major: The following table shows the number of awards of disablement benefit for the prescribed disease C23 for the years ending September 1984-86, and the number of these awards to claimants who were employed in the printing industry. Information for earlier years is not available.

	1984	1985	1986
Total awards	5	5	5
Awards to claimants from the printing industry	Nil	1	Nil

Abortions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, of those abortions performed in the first quarter of 1986 *(a)* in emergency to save the life of the mother and *(b)* because of risk to the life of the mother, how many were performed on women pregnant with babies of gestation (i) 0 to 20 weeks, (ii) 21 to 24 weeks and (iii) 25 weeks or over.

Mr. Newton: Provisional figures are shown in the table, which are base on notifications received up to the end of October 1986 for terminations carried out in the March quarter 1986.

Number of notifications of legal abortions to resident and non-resident women by gestation period in weeks, and grounds 1 and 5[1], England and Wales, March quarter 1986.

Gestation weeks	Grounds[1] 1	5
0—20	103	—
21—24	1	1
25 and over	—	—

[1] Ground 1. The continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman greater than if the pregnancy were terminated.
Ground 5. In emergency, to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services of those abortions performed in the latest year for which figures are available upon women of *(a)* 0 to 20 weeks gestation, *(b)* 21 to 24 weeks gestation and *(c)* 25 weeks and over, how many were performed (i) under the National Health Service in National Health Service centres, (ii) under the National Health Service through agency arrangements, (iii) in pay beds in National Health Service centres and (iv) in private clinics.

Mr. Newton: The information available by gestation and category of premises is shown in the table. The category of bed occupied in National Health Service hospitals is not collected in the notification of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967, and information on gestation is not available from the "Hospital In-patient Enquiry".

Number of notifications of legal abortions to resident and non-resident women by category of premises and gestation period in weeks
England and Wales 1985

Gestation weeks	Category of premises		
	NHS	non-NHS	
		Total	of which Agency[1]
0 to 20	64,991	103,897	5,904
21 to 24	322	2,702	34
25 and over	27	6	—

[1] Operations carried out in the private sector on NHS patients.

NHS (Fuel Supply)

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had about the renewal of the National Coal Board's contract to supply solid fuel to the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The existing agreement for supply of coal to National Health Service authorities by British Coal (formerly National Coal Board) commenced in April 1984 and has an expiry date of March 31 1987.

In conjunction with representatives of the principal coal-burning NHS regions, the Department's director of procurement has been engaged in commercial negotiations with British Coal throughout 1986. These negotiations have taken account of the dramatic changes in world energy markets over the past 18 months and British Coal's willingness to revise its own pricing mechanisms to meet this challenge.

A new supply agreement with British Coal was agreed in principle early in December 1986 and, subject to final review and acceptance by senior NHS officers at a meeting arranged for Thursday of this week, the director and British Coal hope to announce an improved agreement covering the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1989.

I am advised that British Coal and regional health authorities are satisfied that the new agreement, whilst providing security of supply to NHS establishments, will also enable the market and supply situation to be kept under regular review. The agreement also takes full account of the complex distribution and usage requirements of the National Health Service and provides a sound platform for British Coal to retain and possibly extend the use of coal subject to the normal value-for-money criteria.

Condoms

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* information available to him on the unit retail price for condoms in each European Economic Community country.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has yet fixed the flat rate national insurance contributions to be paid by share fishermen and volunteer development workers for 1987-88.

Mr. Major: For 1987-88 the flat-rate national insurance contributions of share fishermen and volunteer development workers will remain at £6·55 per week.

General Practitioners (Surgery Premises)

Mr. Budgen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to take following the study he commissioned of the scope for reducing public sector involvement in funding loans to family doctors for the provision of surgery premises.

Mr. Newton: The General Practice Finance Corporation has been asked to invite private financial institutions to participate in loans to family doctors for the provision of surgery premises. The decision follows a study by Hambros bank into the feasibility of reducing public sector involvement in these loans. Hitherto the corporation's only method of providing funds for doctors has been public sector borrowing and as such this source has been subject to cash limits. The new arrangements will free the corporation from this restriction by allowing it to provide money to doctors from private sector sources such as banks and building societies. As a result, the public sector provision is being reduced significantly over the next three years. The Government are confident that the GPFC is well placed to attract private sector finance alongside public sector finance by virtue of its present excellent level of performance. Ministers will be kept closely informed of progress with this new development. We will wish to ensure that recent improvements in surgery premises are maintained, particularly in underprivileged areas.

Patient Care

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for 1985 for each region and for England as a whole the number of deaths and discharges among, and the number of beds occupied on 31 December by, patients receiving treatment under contractual arrangements with institutions outside the National Health Service; and if he will break down these figures into the categories of *(a)* medical, *(b)* surgical, *(c)* pre-convalescent and post-operative, *(d)* convalescent, *(e)* geriatric, *(f)* diseases of the chest, *(g)* maternity, *(h)* mental illness, *(i)* mental handicap, *(j)* rehabilitation, *(k)* terminal care and *(l)* others.

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service in-patients received treatment in private hospitals in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 24 November 1986, c. *129-130*]: The information is given in the table.

Patients receiving treatment under contractual arrangements with institutions outside the National Health Service in 1985

Specialty	*Deaths and discharges*	*Average daily bed occupation*
England		
Medical	1,368	68·6
Surgical	10,350	198·1
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	193	11·3
Convalescent	6,279	255·4
Geriatric	999	736·0
Diseases of the chest	1,129	38·7
Maternity	614	9·6
Mental illness	651	244·4
Mental handicap	452	626·3
Rehabilitation	372	71·3
Terminal care	4,645	332·1
Others	594	466·7
Totals	27,848	3,098·5
Northern Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	1,130	47·2
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	3	92·1
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	—	—
Others	45	56·5
Totals	1,178	193·8
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
Medical	38	2·8
Surgical	231	7·6
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	546	18·0
Geriatric	227	59·5
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	58	13·7
Mental handicap	140	2·5
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	56	6·0
Others	1	7·9
Totals	1,297	118·0
Trent Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	1·0
Surgical	1	0·0
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	293	10·5
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	1	1·7
Mental handicap	1	1·0
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	463	23·0
Others	—	1·9
Totals	759	39·1
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
Medical	992	16·7
Surgical	2,509	35·2
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	—	—
Geriatric	127	13·3
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	614	9·6
Mental illness	2	2·4
Mental handicap	4	30·0
Rehabilitation	1	0·1
Terminal care	98	6·3
Others	17	0·0
Totals	4,364	113·6
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
Medical	2	4·1
Surgical	2,265	44·1
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	118	3·3
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	1·0
Mental handicap	261	88·9
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	89	3·2
Others	71	62·2
Totals	2,806	208·8
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	1,411	69·3
Geriatric	43	123·6
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	17	13·1
Mental handicap	1	67·8
Rehabilitation	227	24·0
Terminal care	644	37·0
Others	157	86·0
Totals	2,500	440·8
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	984	14·0
Geriatric	28	32·6
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	—	5·0
Rehabilitation	90	37·7
Terminal care	33	2·5
Others	12	24·7
Totals	1,149	116·5
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
Medical	193	25·0
Surgical	610	27·1
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	193	11·3
Convalescent	54	21·8
Geriatric	90	104·6
Diseases of the chest	1,079	53·6
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	6	30·3
Mental handicap	—	41·0

Specialty	Deaths and discharges	Average daily bed occupation
Rehabilitation	2	0·5
Terminal care	215	59·2
Others	85	146·5
Totals	2,529	520·9
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
Medical	2	5·4
Surgical	188	2·8
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	48	3·7
Geriatric	62	96·8
Diseases of the chest	27	1·4
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	3	4·4
Mental handicap	—	8·0
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	—	2·0
Others	6	50·2
Totals	336	174·7
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	—	—
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	37	69·8
Mental handicap	—	1·0
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	—	—
Others	—	9·8
Totals	37	80·6
South Western Regional Health Authority		
Medical	341	13·6
Surgical	2,144	39·7
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	1,533	55·0
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	—	—
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	224	15·5
Others	177	11·3
Totals	4,419	135·1
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	1,838	31·4
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	—	—
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	—	23·0
Rehabilitation	52	9·0
Terminal care	1,461	73·5
Others	—	—
Totals	3,351	136·9
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	—	—
Geriatric	49	88·4
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	35	148·9
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	88	13·0
Others	—	—
Totals	172	250·3
North Western Regional Health Authority		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	564	10·2
Pre-convalescent and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	120	11·1
Geriatric	373	215·2
Diseases of the chest	23	3·7
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	527	108·0
Mental handicap	7	117·1
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	1,272	88·9
Others	23	9·7
Totals	2,909	563·9
Special Health Authorities		
Medical	—	—
Surgical	—	—
Pre-convalescnt and post-operative	—	—
Convalescent	42	1·5
Geriatric	—	—
Diseases of the chest	—	—
Maternity	—	—
Mental illness	—	—
Mental handicap	—	—
Rehabilitation	—	—
Terminal care	—	—
Others	—	—
Totals	42	1·5

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will set out, region by region, district health authority in-patient waiting lists, the total populations living in each district, the percentage which the former represents of the latter and their national ranking by that percentage;

(2) if he will set out, region by region, the hospital urgent in-patient waiting list in each health district, together with the number of urgent cases waiting more than a month, the percentage the latter represents of the former and their national ranking in England by that percentage;

(3) if he will set out, region by region the hospital non-urgent in-patient waiting list in each health district, together with the numbers of non-urgent cases waiting more than a year, the percentage the latter represents of the former and their national ranking in England by that percentage.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1986, c. *215-16*]: The information requested is given in the tables.

Resident population is not a reliable indicator in this context as hospitals provide services for patients from beyond their district health authority boundaries.

I therefore refer the hon. Member to the performance indicator package held in the statistics section of the Library. The PI package contains specialty specific PIs which relate the number on the waiting list to the catchment population for five specialties (general surgery and urology, trauma and orthopaedic, gynaecology, ear, nose and throat and ophthalmology.)

Number of cases on in-patient waiting list at 31 March 1986 and resident population (mid 1985) with national ranking by cases as a percentage of population

District Health Authority	*Total cases*	*Resident population (hundreds)*	*Total cases as a percentage of resident population*	*National ranking*
Northern Regional Health Authority				
Hartlepool	1,405	916	1·5	126
North Tees	810	1,758	0·5	10
South Tees	6,149	2,925	2·1	171
East Cumbria	3,018	1,766	1·7	144
South Cumbria	1,357	1,715	0·8	41
West Cumbria	1,349	1,363	1·0	55
Darlington	2,214	1,241	1·8	150
Durham	820	2,365	0·3	3
North West Durham	664	863	0·8	37
South West Durham	498	1,540	0·3	2
Northumberland	1,861	3,006	0·6	20
Gateshead	1,155	2,081	0·6	15
Newcastle	8,632	2,822	3·1	182
North Tyneside	1,207	1,932	0·6	22
South Tyneside	682	1,576	0·4	9
Sunderland	3,890	2,988	1·3	93
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority				
Hull	6,627	3,103	2·1	172
East Yorkshire	1,108	1,866	0·6	18
Grimsby	1,245	1,597	0·8	39
Scunthorpe	2,030	1,934	1·0	61
Northallerton	419	1,126	0·4	4
York	2,689	2,593	1·0	59
Scarborough	1,611	1,426	1·1	77
Harrogate	1,799	1,339	1·3	97
Bradford	6,411	3,388	1·9	155
Airedale	2,649	1,729	1·5	125
Calderdale	986	1,917	0·5	13
Huddersfield	2,697	2,125	1·3	89
Dewsbury	661	1,644	0·4	7
Leeds Western	4,397	3,601	1·2	85
Leeds Eastern	5,663	3,504	1·6	133
Wakefield	2,269	1,422	1·6	130
Pontefract	2,179	1,680	1·3	92
Trent Regional Health Authority				
North Derbyshire	2,633	3,610	0·7	31
Southern Derbyshire	6,507	5,220	1·2	87
Leicestershire	7,962	8,722	0·9	47
North Lincolnshire	3,158	2,657	1·2	80
South Lincolnshire	3,948	2,946	1·3	96
Bassetlaw	809	1,042	0·8	38
Central Nottinghamshire	5,425	2,851	1·9	156
Nottingham	8,215	6,166	1·3	95
Barnsley	2,463	2,233	1·1	72
Doncaster	4,641	2,885	1·6	132
Rotherham	4,213	2,527	1·7	140
Sheffield	11,903	5,387	2·2	175
East Anglian Regional Health Authority				
Cambridge	5,196	2,686	1·9	159
Peterborough	3,239	1,966	1·6	139
West Suffolk	2,641	2,249	1·2	79
East Suffolk	3,071	3,152	1·0	54
Norwich	6,915	4,606	1·5	121
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	3,524	1,920	1·8	152
West Norfolk and Wisbech	1,926	1,813	1·1	66
Huntingdon	840	1,255	0·7	27

District Health Authority	Total cases	Resident population (hundreds)	Total cases as a percentage of resident population	National ranking
North West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North Bedfordshire	2,255	2,420	0·9	49
South Bedfordshire	2,177	2,747	0·8	42
North Hertfordshire	2,895	1,866	1·6	127
East Hertfordshire	1,456	2,927	0·5	12
North West Hertfordshire	1,848	2,617	0·7	30
South West Hertfordshire	1,956	2,451	0·8	43
Barnet	4,186	3,012	1·4	104
Harrow	1,176	2,017	0·6	17
Hillingdon	7,648	2,321	3·3	184
Hounslow and Spelthorne	5,173	2,858	1·8	151
Ealing	2,219	2,924	0·8	35
Brent	2,010	2,549	0·8	40
Paddington and North Kensington	3,111	1,226	2·5	177
Riverside	5,696	2,884	2·0	164
North East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Basildon and Thurrock	6,044	2,807	2·2	173
Mid Essex	3,610	2,838	1·3	90
North East Essex	4,413	2,950	1·5	120
West Essex	5,012	2,551	2·0	162
Southend	3,177	3,191	1·0	56
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	6,640	4,581	1·4	117
Hampstead	2,073	1,073	1·9	158
Bloomsbury	14,405	1,297	11·1	191
Islington	2,410	1,679	1·4	112
City and Hackney	6,071	1,926	3·2	183
Newham	1,117	2,086	0·5	14
Tower Hamlets	6,808	1,471	4·6	190
Enfield	2,915	2,650	1·1	71
Haringey	1,225	1,972	0·6	21
Redbridge	1,673	2,280	0·7	32
Waltham Forest	4,341	2,162	2·0	167
South East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Brighton	3,915	2,970	1·3	94
Eastbourne	2,685	2,236	1·2	82
Hastings	2,530	1,618	1·6	128
South East Kent	2,658	2,616	1·0	58
Canterbury and Thanet	4,588	2,996	1·5	124
Dartford and Gravesham	4,414	2,214	2·0	165
Maidstone	2,157	1,941	1·1	74
Medway	2,105	3,223	0·7	25
Tunbridge Wells	4,949	1,962	2·5	176
Bexley	1,532	2,185	0·7	29
Greenwich	2,632	2,162	1·2	84
Bromley	1,900	2,979	0·6	23
West Lambeth	6,405	1,626	3·9	188
Camberwell	2,681	2,120	1·3	88
Lewisham and North Southwark	8,243	3,172	2·6	178
South West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North West Surrey	2,989	2,081	1·4	114
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	4,760	2,770	1·7	145
South West Surrey	3,210	1,835	1·7	149
Mid Surrey	2,327	1,667	1·4	106
East Surrey	1,601	1,861	0·9	45
Chichester	2,420	1,757	1·4	101
Mid Downs	2,233	2,719	0·8	44
Worthing	3,455	2,401	1·4	115
Croydon	2,350	3,190	0·7	33
Kingston and Esher	2,576	1,794	1·4	113
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	3,325	2,299	1·4	116
Wandsworth	2,649	1,904	1·4	105
Merton and Sutton	3,098	3,341	0·9	48
Wessex Regional Health Authority				
East Dorset	5,290	4,348	1·2	83
West Dorset	2,264	1,929	1·2	78
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6,247	5,243	1·2	81
Southampton and South West Hampshire	8,492	4,140	2·1	169
Winchester	2,341	2,082	1·1	76
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	3,589	2,144	1·7	142

District Health Authority	Total cases	Resident population (hundreds)	Total cases as a percentage of resident population	National ranking
Salisbury	4,489	1,221	3·7	186
Swindon	3,063	2,245	1·4	99
Bath	5,449	3,958	1·4	100
Isle of Wight	1,854	1,229	1·5	122
Oxford Regional Health Authority				
East Berkshire	7,470	3,598	2·1	170
West Berkshire	4,593	4,367	1·1	62
Aylesbury Vale	3,813	1,394	2·7	179
Wycombe	1,033	2,721	0·4	5
Milton Keynes	2,121	1,532	1·4	102
Kettering	2,790	2,498	1·1	75
Northampton	5,164	2,963	1·7	148
Oxfordshire	5,792	5,300	1·1	70
South Western Regional Health Authority				
Bristol and Weston	7,944	3,628	2·2	174
Frenchay	3,506	2,188	1·6	131
Southmead	2,214	2,309	1·0	51
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4,689	4,438	1·1	63
Exeter	4,719	3,009	1·6	129
North Devon	1,358	1,299	1·0	60
Plymouth	5,281	3,248	1·6	136
Torbay	1,781	2,324	0·8	36
Cheltenham	2,189	2,069	1·1	64
Gloucester	4,346	3,045	1·4	111
Somerset	4,904	3,945	1·2	86
West Midlands Regional Health Authority				
Bromsgrove and Redditch	2,219	1,627	1·4	98
Herefordshire	2,656	1,527	1·7	147
Kidderminster and District	1,298	1,011	1·3	91
Worcester and District	3,449	2,343	1·5	118
Shropshire	7,696	3,903	2·0	163
Mid Staffordshire	1,706	3,061	0·6	16
North Staffordshire	9,023	4,630	1·9	160
South East Staffordshire	2,374	2,513	0·9	50
Rugby	528	856	0·6	19
North Warwickshire	1,833	1,727	1·1	65
South Warwickshire	3,366	2,214	1·5	123
Central Birmingham	5,346	1,799	3·0	181
East Birmingham	3,367	2,017	1·7	141
North Birmingham	2,267	1,634	1·4	103
South Birmingham	7,291	2,491	2·9	180
West Birmingham	3,479	2,134	1·6	137
Coventry	6,091	3,122	2·0	161
Dudley	4,244	3,008	1·4	107
Sandwell	1,399	3,033	0·5	11
Solihull	1,967	2,019	1·0	53
Walsall	2,856	2,629	1·1	68
Wolverhampton	4,094	2,532	1·6	134
Mersey Regional Health Authority				
Chester	1,805	1,779	1·0	57
Crewe	4,695	2,457	1·9	157
Halton	319	1,423	0·2	1
Macclesfield	1,159	1,784	0·6	24
Warrington	2,672	1,792	1·5	119
Liverpool	8,321	4,915	1·7	143
St. Helens and Knowsley	3,868	3,546	1·1	69
Southport and Formby	1,145	1,180	1·0	52
South Sefton	3,657	1,804	2·0	168
Wirral	3,138	3,554	0·9	46
North Western Regional Health Authority				
Lancaster	2,100	1,285	1·6	138
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	4,524	3,173	1·4	110
Preston	4,725	1,244	3·8	187
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	2,042	2,723	0·7	34
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,540	2,301	1·1	73
West Lancashire	1,984	1,075	1·8	153
Chorley and South Ribble	764	1,927	0·4	6
Bolton	2,828	2,612	1·1	67
Bury	735	1,733	0·4	8

District Health Authority	Total cases	Resident population (hundreds)	Total cases as a percentage of resident population	National ranking
North Manchester	2,753	1,468	1·9	154
Central Manchester	5,436	1,260	4·3	189
South Manchester	6,012	1,783	3·4	185
Oldham	4,381	2,197	2·0	166
Rochdale	3,033	2,136	1·4	108
Salford	4,156	2,400	1·7	146
Stockport	4,713	2,912	1·6	135
Tameside and Glossop	1,639	2,449	0·7	26
Trafford	1,522	2,178	0·7	28
Wigan	4,355	3,067	1·4	109

Number of urgent cases and number of urgent cases waiting for more than one month on in-patient waiting list at 31 March 1986 with national ranking by urgent cases waiting over a month as a percentage of all urgent cases.

District Health Authority	Total urgent cases	Number waiting over one month	Percentage of urgent cases waiting over one month	National ranking
Northern Regional Health Authority				
Hartlepool	69	17	24·6	50
North Tees	0	0	—	1
South Tees	180	88	48·9	93
East Cumbria	2	0	0·0	1
South Cumbria	14	1	7·1	35
West Cumbria	33	14	42·4	78
Darlington	5	5	100·0	187
Durham	22	10	45·5	86
North West Durham	4	0	0·0	1
South West Durham	0	0	—	1
Northumberland	202	158	78·2	158
Gateshead	42	23	54·8	112
Newcastle	1,154	886	76·8	156
North Tyneside	21	0	0·0	1
South Tyneside	0	0	—	1
Sunderland	167	137	82·0	169
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority				
Hull	0	0	—	1
East Yorkshire	0	0	—	1
Grimsby	8	0	0·0	1
Scunthorpe	0	0	—	1
Northallerton	0	0	—	1
York	9	2	22·2	46
Scarborough	43	10	23·3	48
Harrogate	50	16	32·0	63
Bradford	269	132	49·1	95
Airedale	101	63	62·4	123
Calderdale	1	0	0·0	1
Huddersfield	0	0	—	1
Dewsbury	4	3	75·0	149
Leeds Western	587	446	76·0	154
Leeds Eastern	604	500	82·8	172
Wakefield	61	30	49·2	96
Pontefract	508	399	78·5	159
Trent Regional Health Authority				
North Derbyshire	211	77	36·5	70
Southern Derbyshire	189	80	42·3	77
Leicestershire	891	381	42·8	79
North Lincolnshire	112	69	61·6	120
South Lincolnshire	66	35	53·0	108
Bassetlaw	24	23	95·8	185
Central Nottinghamshire	76	39	51·3	100
Nottingham	160	87	54·4	110
Barnsley	90	23	25·6	53
Doncaster	407	308	75·7	151
Rotherham	114	59	51·8	101
Sheffield	1,175	902	76·8	155
East Anglian Regional Health Authority				
Cambridge	619	424	68·5	138
Peterborough	40	34	85·0	177
West Suffolk	61	33	54·1	109

District Health Authority	Total urgent cases	Number waiting over one month	Percentage of urgent cases waiting over one month	National ranking
East Suffolk	137	62	45·3	85
Norwich	1,279	994	77·7	157
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	358	297	83·0	173
West Norfolk and Wisbech	120	98	81·7	165
Huntingdon	15	3	20·0	43
North West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North Bedfordshire	2	2	100·0	187
South Bedfordshire	0	0	—	1
North Hertfordshire	1	1	100·0	187
East Hertfordshire	8	5	62·5	124
North West Hertfordshire	0	0	—	1
South West Hertfordshire	160	132	82·5	170
Barnet	499	131	26·3	54
Harrow	8	8	100·0	187
Hillingdon	773	585	75·7	152
Hounslow and Spelthorne	503	303	60·2	118
Ealing	364	276	75·8	153
Brent	28	7	25·0	51
Paddington and North Kensington	150	79	52·7	107
Riverside	771	671	87·0	179
North East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Basildon and Thurrock	883	720	81·5	164
Mid Essex	23	5	21·7	45
North East Essex	461	229	49·7	98
West Essex	61	50	82·0	167
Southend	584	335	57·4	115
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	246	199	80·9	163
Hampstead	49	22	44·9	83
Bloomsbury	584	138	23·6	49
Islington	318	196	61·6	121
City and Hackney	2,192	1,248	56·9	114
Newham	62	61	98·4	186
Tower Hamlets	1,657	1,395	84·2	176
Enfield	41	2	4·9	32
Haringey	160	77	48·1	89
Redbridge	95	89	93·7	184
Waltham Forest	190	85	44·7	81
South East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Brighton	241	97	40·2	74
Eastbourne	43	13	30·2	59
Hastings	109	57	52·3	104
South East Kent	19	3	15·8	40
Canterbury and Thanet	364	177	48·6	92
Dartford and Gravesham	23	1	4·3	31
Maidstone	99	52	52·5	105
Medway	200	148	74·0	147
Tunbridge Wells	395	273	69·1	140
Bexley	0	0	—	1
Greenwich	0	0	—	1
Bromley	7	1	14·3	39
West Lambeth	669	588	87·9	181
Camberwell	135	84	62·2	122
Lewisham and North Southwark	1,072	790	73·7	145
South West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North West Surrey	78	65	83·3	174
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	1,429	876	61·3	119
South West Surrey	103	6	5·8	34
Mid Surrey	131	78	59·5	117
East Surrey	146	40	27·4	56
Chichester	151	55	36·4	69
Mid Downs	98	44	44·9	83
Worthing	377	240	63·7	127
Croydon	180	94	52·2	103
Kingston and Esher	253	180	71·1	143
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	216	105	48·6	91
Wandsworth	447	189	42·3	76
Merton and Sutton	406	128	31·5	62
Wessex Regional Health Authority				
East Dorset	964	634	65·8	132

District Health Authority	Total urgent cases	Number waiting over one month	Percentage of urgent cases waiting over one month	National ranking
West Dorset	250	187	74·8	148
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	333	149	44·7	82
Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,214	797	65·7	131
Winchester	109	54	49·5	97
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	134	106	79·1	161
Salisbury	300	212	70·7	141
Swindon	56	18	32·1	66
Bath	446	330	74·0	146
Isle of Wight	27	0	0·0	1
Oxford Regional Health Authority				
East Berkshire	542	461	85·1	178
West Berkshire	83	23	27·7	57
Aylesbury Vale	74	35	47·3	88
Wycombe	7	0	0·0	1
Milton Keynes	41	28	68·3	137
Kettering	21	8	38·1	71
Northampton	703	653	92·9	183
Oxfordshire	87	17	19·5	42
South Western Regional Health Authority				
Bristol and Weston	473	313	66·2	133
Frenchay	88	36	40·9	75
Southmead	50	25	50·0	99
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	286	236	82·5	171
Exeter	131	41	31·3	61
North Devon	1	0	0·0	1
Plymouth	206	107	51·9	102
Torbay	89	60	67·4	135
Cheltenham	6	4	66·7	134
Gloucester	331	144	43·5	80
Somerset	524	253	48·3	90
West Midlands Regional Health Authority				
Bromsgrove and Redditch	41	2	4·9	32
Herefordshire	98	48	49·0	94
Kidderminster and District	13	1	7·7	36
Worcester and District	33	3	9·1	37
Shropshire	356	209	58·7	116
Mid Staffordshire	65	26	40·0	73
North Staffordshire	943	849	90·0	182
South East Staffordshire	14	9	64·3	129
Rugby	0	0	—	1
North Warwickshire	39	15	38·5	72
South Warwickshire	101	74	73·3	144
Central Birmingham	807	548	67·9	136
East Birmingham	234	123	52·6	106
North Birmingham	61	50	82·0	167
South Birmingham	788	622	78·9	160
West Birmingham	72	45	62·5	124
Coventry	664	373	56·2	113
Dudley	161	58	36·0	68
Sandwell	0	0	—	1
Solihull	0	0	—	1
Walsall	9	3	33·3	67
Wolverhampton	134	92	68·7	139
Mersey Regional Health Authority				
Chester	55	5	9·1	37
Crewe	484	396	81·8	166
Halton	4	0	0·0	1
Macclesfield	158	33	20·9	44
Warrington	0	0	—	1
Liverpool	575	360	62·6	126
St. Helens and Knowsley	8	8	100·0	187
Southport and Formby	0	0	—	1
South Sefton	114	21	18·4	41
Wirral	195	53	27·2	55
North Western Regional Health Authority				
Lancaster	118	103	87·3	180
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	843	547	64·9	130
Preston	72	18	25·0	51
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	8	0	0·0	1

District Health Authority	Total urgent cases	Number waiting over one month	Percentage of urgent cases waiting over one month	National ranking
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	284	214	75·4	150
West Lancashire	28	0	0·0	1
Chorley and South Ribble	0	0	—	1
Bolton	40	0	0·0	1
Bury	6	5	83·3	174
North Manchester	187	43	23·0	47
Central Manchester	350	112	32·0	63
South Manchester	753	344	45·7	87
Oldham	323	229	70·9	142
Rochdale	122	78	63·9	128
Salford	261	81	31·0	60
Stockport	404	325	80·4	162
Tameside and Glossop	106	58	54·7	111
Trafford	25	8	32·0	63
Wigan	74	22	29·7	58

Number of non-urgent in-patient and non-urgent cases as at 31 March 1986 waiting for more than a year and their national ranking as a percentage of all non-urgent cases

District Health Authority	Total non-urgent cases	Number waiting over one year	Percentage of non-urgent cases waiting over one year	National ranking
Northern Regional Health Authority				
Hartlepool	1,336	395	29·6	139
North Tees	810	47	5·8	8
South Tees	5,969	1,545	25·9	123
East Cumbria	3,016	552	18·3	73
South Cumbria	1,343	223	16·6	62
West Cumbria	1,316	125	9·5	27
Darlington	2,209	486	22·0	99
Durham	798	46	5·8	7
North West Durham	660	19	2·9	3
South West Durham	498	87	17·5	67
Northumberland	1,659	293	17·7	68
Gateshead	1,113	104	9·3	26
Newcastle	7,478	1,141	15·3	54
North Tyneside	1,186	102	8·6	22
South Tyneside	682	103	15·1	52
Sunderland	3,723	531	14·3	49
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority				
Hull	6,627	2,187	33·0	153
East Yorkshire	1,108	183	16·5	61
Grimsby	1,237	76	6·1	10
Scunthorpe	2,030	665	32·8	150
Northallerton	419	14	3·3	4
York	2,680	292	10·9	32
Scarborough	1,568	121	7·7	16
Harrogate	1,749	122	7·0	13
Bradford	6,142	1,206	19·6	82
Airedale	2,548	842	33·0	154
Calderdale	985	98	9·9	30
Huddersfield	2,697	526	19·5	80
Dewsbury	657	135	20·5	88
Leeds Western	3,810	807	21·2	92
Leeds Eastern	5,059	1,345	26·6	126
Wakefield	2,208	191	8·7	23
Pontefract	1,671	579	34·6	162
Trent Regional Health Authority				
North Derbyshire	2,422	883	36·5	167
Southern Derbyshire	6,318	1,269	20·1	84
Leicestershire	7,071	1,128	16·0	58
North Lincolnshire	3,046	598	19·6	81
South Lincolnshire	3,882	1,328	34·2	160
Bassetlaw	785	219	27·9	133
Central Nottinghamshire	5,349	2,444	45·7	182
Nottingham	8,055	2,483	30·8	146
Barnsley	2,373	202	8·5	21
Doncaster	4,234	1,318	31·1	147
Rotherham	4,099	1,379	33·6	158
Sheffield	10,728	4,286	40·0	171

District Health Authority	Total non-urgent cases	Number waiting over one year	Percentage of non-urgent cases waiting over one year	National ranking
East Anglian Regional Health Authority				
Cambridge	4,577	2,160	47·2	183
Peterborough	3,199	536	16·8	65
West Suffolk	2,580	498	19·3	79
East Suffolk	2,934	448	15·3	55
Norwich	5,636	2,305	40·9	174
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	3,166	1,117	35·3	164
West Norfolk and Wisbech	1,806	152	8·4	19
Huntingdon	825	11	1·3	1
North-West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North Bedfordshire	2,253	579	25·7	121
South Bedfordshire	2,177	201	9·2	25
North Hertfordshire	2,894	859	29·7	140
East Hertfordshire	1,448	99	6·8	12
North West Hertfordshire	1,848	118	6·4	11
South West Hertfordshire	1,796	278	15·5	56
Barnet	3,687	739	20·0	83
Harrow	1,168	99	8·5	20
Hillingdon	6,875	3,536	51·4	188
Hounslow and Spelthorne	4,670	1,540	33·0	152
Ealing	1,855	932	50·2	187
Brent	1,982	354	17·9	70
Paddington and North Kensington	2,961	223	7·5	15
Riverside	4,925	800	16·2	60
North East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Basildon and Thurrock	5,161	2,110	40·9	173
Mid Essex	3,587	486	13·5	42
North East Essex	3,952	659	16·7	63
West Essex	4,951	1,002	20·2	85
Southend	2,593	644	24·8	115
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	6,394	1,969	30·8	145
Hampstead	2,024	664	32·8	151
Bloomsbury	13,821	2,886	20·9	90
Islington	2,092	464	22·2	100
City and Hackney	3,879	1,443	37·2	169
Newham	1,055	194	18·4	74
Tower Hamlets	5,151	2,744	53·3	189
Enfield	2,874	599	20·8	89
Haringey	1,065	62	5·8	9
Redbridge	1,578	287	18·2	71
Waltham Forest	4,151	799	19·2	77
South East Thames Regional Health Authority				
Brighton	3,674	708	19·3	78
Eastbourne	2,642	496	18·8	76
Hastings	2,421	317	13·1	39
South East Kent	2,639	258	9·8	29
Canterbury and Thanet	4,224	938	22·2	101
Dartford and Gravesham	4,391	707	16·1	59
Maidstone	2,058	551	26·8	128
Medway	1,905	353	18·5	75
Tunbridge Wells	4,554	1,966	43·2	179
Bexley	1,532	178	11·6	33
Greenwich	2,632	342	13·0	38
Bromley	1,893	489	25·8	122
West Lambeth	5,736	2,516	43·9	180
Camberwell	2,546	326	12·8	35
Lewisham and North Southwark	7,171	1,609	22·4	105
South West Thames Regional Health Authority				
North West Surrey	2,911	364	12·5	34
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	3,331	835	25·1	116
South West Surrey	3,107	664	21·4	93
Mid Surrey	2,196	637	29·0	137
East Surrey	1,455	335	23·0	108
Chichester	2,269	631	27·8	132
Mid Downs	2,135	305	14·3	50
Worthing	3,078	673	21·9	97
Croydon	2,170	212	9·8	28
Kingston and Esher	2,323	953	41·0	175
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	3,109	1,402	45·1	181

District Health Authority	Total non-urgent cases	Number waiting over one year	Percentage of non-urgent cases waiting over one year	National ranking
Wandsworth	2,202	300	13·6	43
Merton and Sutton	2,692	215	8·0	18
Wessex Regional Health Authority				
East Dorset	4,326	905	20·9	91
West Dorset	2,014	551	27·4	131
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	5,914	1,277	21·6	96
Southampton and South West Hampshire	7,278	2,537	34·9	163
Winchester	2,232	668	29·9	141
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	3,455	920	26·6	127
Salisbury	4,189	1,496	35·7	165
Swindon	3,007	411	13·7	45
Bath	5,003	1,211	24·2	113
Isle of Wight	1,827	188	10·3	31
Oxford Regional Health Authority				
East Berkshire	6,928	2,344	33·8	159
West Berkshire	4,510	352	7·8	17
Aylesbury Vale	3,739	1,546	41·3	177
Wycombe	1,026	72	7·0	14
Milton Keynes	2,080	541	26·0	124
Kettering	2,769	791	28·6	136
Northampton	4,461	1,841	41·3	176
Oxfordshire	5,705	756	13·3	40
South Western Regional Health Authority				
Bristol and Weston	7,471	1,642	22·0	98
Frenchay	3,418	1,881	55·0	190
Southmead	2,164	463	21·4	94
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4,403	1,580	35·9	166
Exeter	4,588	697	15·2	53
North Devon	1,357	120	8·8	24
Plymouth	5,075	1,701	33·5	156
Torbay	1,692	392	23·2	110
Cheltenham	2,183	622	28·5	135
Gloucester	4,015	1,096	27·3	130
Somerset	4,380	1,333	30·4	144
West Midlands Regional Health Authority				
Bromsgrove and Redditch	2,178	556	25·5	119
Herefordshire	2,558	775	30·3	143
Kidderminster and District	1,285	181	14·1	47
Worcester and District	3,416	441	12·9	37
Shropshire	7,340	1,998	27·2	129
Mid Staffordshire	1,641	300	18·3	72
North Staffordshire	8,080	2,775	34·3	161
South East Staffordshire	2,360	325	13·8	46
Rugby	528	108	20·5	87
North Warwickshire	1,794	400	22·3	104
South Warwickshire	3,265	1,220	37·4	170
Central Birmingham	4,539	1,374	30·3	142
East Birmingham	3,133	1,503	48·0	185
North Birmingham	2,206	448	20·3	86
South Birmingham	6,503	3,786	58·2	191
West Birmingham	3,407	856	25·1	117
Coventry	5,427	2,006	37·0	168
Dudley	4,083	1,161	28·4	134
Sandwell	1,399	191	13·7	44
Solihull	1,967	437	22·2	102
Walsall	2,847	704	24·7	114
Wolverhampton	3,960	851	21·5	95
Mersey Regional Health Authority				
Chester	1,750	232	13·3	41
Crewe	4,211	2,097	49·8	186
Halton	315	9	2·9	2
Macclesfield	1,001	408	40·8	172
Warrington	2,672	1,119	41·9	178
Liverpool	7,746	1,292	16·7	64
St. Helens and Knowsley	3,860	926	24·0	111
Southport and Formby	1,145	265	23·1	109
South Sefton	3,543	905	25·5	120
Wirral	2,943	379	12·9	36

District Health Authority	Total non-urgent cases	Number waiting over one year	Percentage of non-urgent cases waiting over one year	National ranking
North Western Regional Health Authority				
Lancaster	1,982	449	22·7	106
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	3,681	652	17·7	69
Preston	4,653	1,540	33·1	155
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	2,034	463	22·8	107
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,256	735	32·6	148
West Lancashire	1,956	281	14·4	51
Chorley and South Ribble	764	250	32·7	149
Bolton	2,788	432	15·5	57
Bury	729	28	3·8	5
North Manchester	2,566	363	14·1	48
Central Manchester	5,086	863	17·0	66
South Manchester	5,259	1,326	25·2	118
Oldham	4,058	1,931	47·6	184
Rochdale	2,911	978	33·6	157
Salford	3,895	937	24·1	112
Stockport	4,309	1,271	29·5	138
Tameside and Glossop	1,533	341	22·2	103
Trafford	1,497	77	5·1	6
Wigan	4,281	1,114	26·0	125

Supplementary Benefit

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the ratio of supplementary benefit claimants to staff in *(a)* each local office of his Department in London, *(b)* the average in each social security region and *(c)* the national average for 1 August 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *419*]: The ratio of supplementary benefit claimants to staff in *(a)* each local office in London, *(b)* the average for each social security region, and *(c)* the national average for 1 August 1983-86 is shown in the table.

(a)

Office	1983	1984	1985	1986
Acton ILO	123:1	146:1	165:1	145:1
Balham ILO	109:1	97:1	106:1	103:1
Barking ILO	134:1	138:1	135:1	119:1
Barnet ILO	142:1	145:1	144:1	132:1
Battersea ILO	111:5	116:1	109:1	120:1
Bexley ILO	122:1	126:1	120:1	127:1
Bloomsbury AO	112:1	109:1	107:1	77:1
Brixton ILO	116:1	114:1	96:1	109:1
Bromley ILO	113:1	128:1	134:1	125:1
Camberwell AO	118:1	118:1	102:1	96:1
Canning Town ILO	111:1	110:1	117:1	91:1
Chelsea ILO	145:1	135:1	141:1	97:1
Cricklewood ILO	136:1	129:1	144:1	138:1
Croydon ILO	115:1	114:1	117:1	123:1
Crystal Palace ILO	112:1	118:1	140:1	124:1
Ealing ILO	114:1	145:1	141:1	133:1
Edgware AO	134:1	133:1	133:1	125:1
Edmonton ILO	138:1	140:1	136:1	140:1
Eltham AO	105:1	107:1	113:1	125:1
Euston ILO	125:1	144:1	135:1	141:1
Finsbury Park ILO	122:1	136:1	121:1	131:1
Greenwich Park ILO	101:1	105:1	97:1	106:1
Hackney ILO	114:1	125:1	125:1	117:1
Harlesden ILO	122:1	121:1	124:1	122:1
Harrow ILO	123:1	135:1	138:1	121:1
Hendon ILO	139:1	143:1	158:1	147:1
Highgate ILO	120:1	123:1	137:1	129:1
Hither Green AO	104:1	98:1	93:1	118:1
Hounslow ILO	125:1	142:1	127:1	124:1
Hoxton ILO	128:1	139:1	137:1	134:1
Ilford ILO	135:1	140:1	129:1	123:1
Kennington Park ILO	120:1	123:1	120:1	129:1
Kensington ILO	99:1	101:1	95:1	89:1
Kingston ILO	133:1	135:1	115:1	105:1
Lewisham ILO	114:1	112:1	113:1	105:1
Leytonstone ILO	120:1	138:1	134:1	130:1
Mitcham AO	137:1	128:1	135:1	130:1
Neasden ILO	135:1	137:1	126:1	111:1
Notting Hill ILO	98:1	111:1	143:1	129:1
Orpington ILO	104:1	113:1	120:1	102:1
Oval AO	111:1	108:1	114:1	125:1
Paddington ILO	134:1	129:1	115:1	87:1
Peckham ILO	113:1	116:1	117:1	100:1
Plaistow ILO	121:1	141:1	143:1	142:1
Poplar ILO	123:1	135:1	137:1	115:1
Romford ILO	139:1	140:1	139:1	132:1
Shoreditch AO	116:1	120:1	120:1	126:1
Southall ILO	115:1	139:1	124:1	130:1
Southwark ILO	125:1	137:1	131:1	111:1
Stepney AO	126:1	123:1	123:1	116:1
Stoke Newington ILO	103:1	119:1	125:1	121:1
Streatham ILO	99:1	102:1	108:1	110:1
Surbiton AO	120:1	119:1	121:1	113:1
Sutton AO	116:1	113:1	121:1	104:1
Thames North AO[1]	13:1	18:1	23:1	24:1
Thames South AO[1]	19:1	20:1	21:1	24:1
Tottenham ILO	129:1	120:1	122:1	108:1
Twickenham ILO	136:1	123:1	128:1	109:1
Uxbridge ILO	119:1	123:1	121:1	118:1
Walthamstow ILO	130:1	130:1	128:1	128:1
Wandsworth ILO	98:1	112:1	116:1	122:1
Westminster ILO	109:1	94:1	71:1	62:1
Wimbledon AO	110:1	112:1	137:1	117:1
Woodgrange Park ILO	131:1	121:1	132:1	123:1
Wood Green ILO	128:1	149:1	137:1	144:1
Woolwich ILO	112:1	115:1	111:1	107:1

[1] Deal only with lodging house cases.

Abbreviations:
ILO – Integrated Local Office;
AO – Area Office.

Note: London offices have been defined as those whose boundaries are fully or partly contained within the old GLC area.

Region	1983	1984	1985	1986
	(b)			
North East	133:1	133:1	135:1	128:1

Region	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Midlands	145:1	145:1	147:1	134:1
London North	129:1	134:1	136:1	126:1
London South	122:1	123:1	122:1	116:1
Wales and South West	132:1	136:1	138:1	131:1
North West	135:1	145:1	147:1	137:1
Scotland	108:1	104:1	103:1	98:1
National	130:1 *(c)*	132:1	133:1	124:1

[1] The number of claimants has been based on a 100 per cent. count of casepapers in action.
[2] Using a spot-date ratio may not give a representative picture for the whole year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply of 17 November 1986, *Official Report*, column *84*, regarding the latest estimates of revenue raised by taxing benefits to the unemployed, when the hon. Member for Oldham, West can expect to receive the letter containing the relevant information.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret the delay in providing revised estimates of the yield from taxing benefits paid to the unemployed.

Revised estimates are as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	[1]300
1983-84	375
1984-85	400
1985-86	400
1986-87	400

[1] Unemployment benefits became taxable on 5 July 1982.

Revenue received from the taxation of benefits paid to the unemployed is not separately identifiable in the collection of tax. Therefore, estimates of the yield are produced by using information on total benefits paid, periods of unemployment, income from employment and tax allowances and reliefs.

Previous estimates were based on aggregate information from several sources and used very broad assumptions. They were subject to wide margins of error. The revised estimates are based on national amounts of benefits paid to the unemployed and information about the individual circumstances of the unemployed respondents to the "Family Expenditure Survey" (FES). From this detailed information, average marginal rates of tax have been estimated and applied to the national levels of benefits paid. The revised estimates were derived using the 1984 FES and may be further revised when later information becomes available.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of retirement pensioners are higher rate taxpayers;

(2) how many higher rate taxpayers there are in each of the counties in England north of the Bristol-Wash line.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

EC Presidency

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community Council of Ministers in respect of economic and financial matters.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: The Economic and Finance Council made the following major contributions to the Presidency's achievements on the completion of the internal market. On financial services, two important directives were adopted. The first extends liberalisation obligations for certain types of capital transactions in the Community, viz long-term commercial credits, transactions in listed and unlisted securities and some unit trusts. The second provides for a standardised regime for the accounts and consolidated accounts of banks in the Community. On tax and the internal market, progress was made on several structural VAT and excise duty proposals, and the Council adopted the 13th VAT directive on harmonising the system for refunding VAT to traders established in third countries.

The Economic and Finance Council agreed the substance of a new Community lending facility for small and medium-sized undertakings. 1,500 million ecus (about £1,100 million) will be made available in two equal tranches, raised by the Commission and the European Investment Bank respectively. All the lending will be managed by the EIB, and will be mainly global loans made through financial intermediaries.

The Council discussed Community spending on agriculture, leading to enunciation of presidency principles for the future operation of the common agricultural policy that:

(1) support prices should more closely reflect market conditions;

(2) the intervention system should operate as a safety net, not as a standard marketing outlet;

(3) price support policies should be flexibly operated so that risks are not borne entirely by public finance.

The Economic and Finance Council had useful discussions on the economic situation in the Community, and agreed to adopt the annual economic report for 1986-87, as amended, to take account of member states comments. The report is directed towards increasing employment in the Community in the context of monetary stability and fiscal consolidation.

The Council reviewed the progress made by the Greek economy since agreement in November 1985 to provide Greece with a Community loan of 1·75 billion ecus (about £1·25 billion). The Council agreed that the Commission should release the second tranche of the loan. In reaching its view, the Council took into account the agreement reached between the Commission and Greece on the phasing out of the Greek trade measures on export subsidies and import deposits.

On travellers' allowances, the Council made good progress on meeting individual member states' concerns in respect of duty — and tax-free shopping, against the background of its acceptance of the continuing existence of duty—and tax-free facilities as long as fiscal frontiers remain. In particular, the Commission gave an assurance that the Channel fixed link would enjoy the same fiscal treatment as other cross channel operators.

Following discussion in both the Economic and Finance Council and the Budget Council, the United

Kingdom presidency secured agreement on 10 July on a new budget for the Community for 1986, only seven days after the European Court of Justice had found that the European Parliament had exceeded its powers in December 1985 in adopting a budget without the agreement of the Council of Ministers. The 1986 budget provided for a United Kingdom abatement of its VAT contribution of 1,900 million ecu (about £1,250 million).

The presidency also secured agreement at Budget Councils in September and November to first and second reading draft Community budgets for 1987 which fully respected budgetary discipline. The European Parliament did not, however, accept that the growth of non-obligatory expenditure should be restricted in accordance with the maximum rate of increase defined in the EEC treaty and, in the absence of agreement between the Council and the Parliament, the President of the Parliament was not in a position to adopt the budget. From 1 January 1987, therefore, the Community will have to operate under the provisional twelfths regime, set out in article 204 of the treaty, until an agreed budget is adopted. This limits total spending to at most the amount spent last year.

With regard to public purchasing, an area of economic policy for which the Treasury has overall policy responsibility, the Industry Council on 22 December agreed on the content of a new supplies directive to modify the early directives. This will further open up purchasing opportunities in the Community. Before the new directive is adopted it will need minor modifications to take account of changes accepted by the Community when agreement was reached on the renegotiation of the GATT agreement on government procurement on 21 November.

A detailed list of United Kingdom presidency achievements will be placed in the Library of the House shortly.

SCOTLAND

"Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Great Britain"

11. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ask the Forestry Commission to respond to the report "Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Great Britain", compiled by the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend will give the Government's response to the report as soon as our study of it has been completed.

Ayr Road Route

12. **Mr. Allan Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate for the start of construction on the Ayr road route.

Mr. Michael Ancram: Work is planned to start on the trunk road section towards the end of 1989.

Pratt and Whitney (Prestwick Airport)

13. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what approaches have been made by Pratt and Whitney of Canada regarding the setting up of a maintenance centre at Prestwick airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The company has no plans at present to expand its European operations and is unlikely to re-assess that position before the end of this year. Meanwhile Locate in Scotland will continue to maintain contact with the company.

Council of Fisheries Ministers

14. **Mr. Pollock** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he attended the last meeting of the European Council of Fisheries Ministers; what subjects were discussed; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: I attended the last meeting on 17 and 18 December. The main topics discussed were the total allowable catches for fish stocks in 1987 and certain fisheries agreements with third countries.

Edinburgh District Council

15. **Sir Alex Fletcher** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take to require Edinburgh district council to apply the fullest amount of funds available to it to eliminate the backlog of housing improvement grant payments.

Mr. Rifkind: In response to representations received from my hon. Friend and others we have issued Edinburgh district council with a provisional non-HRA allocation for next year of £34·52 million. We propose to earmark £26 million of this — £5·75 million more than the council intended so spending — exclusively for the backlog of grant applications. Next year's expenditure on the backlog will, as a result of steps the Government have taken, therefore be double this year's, thus clearing about half of the city's remaining backlog of grant applications.

Labour Statistics

16. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number and percentage of unemployed people in Greenock and Port Glasgow at the latest available date.

Mr. Lang: On 13 November 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the number of unemployed claimants in the Greenock and Port Glasgow Parliamentary constituency totalled 8,519. Unemployment rates are not calculated for parliamentary constituencies but for the Greenock travel-to-work area the rate on the same date was 20·4 per cent.

25. **Mr. George Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland by how much unemployment has increased in North Lanarkshire since May 1979.

Mr. Lang: Between May 1979 and November 1986 unemployment rose from 15,531 in the former North Lanarkshire travel-to-work area to 32,920 in the new Lanarkshire travel-to-work area. As a result of changes in the travel-to-work area boundaries and in the method of the count these figures are not comparable.

34. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are currently unemployed in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: On 13 November 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the number of unemployed claimants in Scotland totalled 360,125 (14·3 per cent.).

Public Expenditure (Unemployment)

17. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has now estimated the effects on unemployment in Scotland of his statement on public expenditure of 9 December.

Mr. Lang: The plans outlined in my right hon. and learned Friend's statement of 9 December need to be viewed in the wider context of the Government's fiscal and monetary strategy. I am satisfied that our policies offer the best hope for sustained economic growth and reduction in unemployment.

Forestry Aid Grant

18. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the agreed arrangements for consultations between the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission over applications for forestry grant aid where the forestry proposal occurs within a national park, area of outstanding natural beauty or environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. John MacKay: Where planting proposals of 10 hectares or more fall within a national park or an area of outstanding natural beauty, the Forestry Commission copies to the appropriate Countryside Commission regional office all the correspondence it has with the local authority in the course of consultations of the proposals. The Countryside Commission does not normally seek to comment, unless the local authority has raised objections which cannot be resolved and the case has to be referred to the Forestry Commission's regional advisory committee under the established procedures. The Countryside Commission does, however, reserve the right to approach the Forestry Commission directly at the initial stage of any application if it disagrees with the views of the local authority.

The Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission have agreed that similar arrangements will apply within environmentally sensitive areas once these have been designated.

20. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the existing consultation arrangements between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council over applications for forestry grant aid to areas other than those within sites of special scientific interest or possible candidates for future notification as sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. John MacKay: Any extension of the present consultation arrangements on forestry proposals is a matter for agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council.

Planning Applications

19. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce measures to expedite the progress of planning applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: We have already taken a number of steps to speed up the processing of planning applications and we are fully aware of the need to ensure that new developments are not unduly delayed. The Scottish Development Department issued a circular in July 1985 advising planning authorities on improving the efficiency of their handling of planning applications. The Housing and Planning Act 1986 contains provision for the establishment of simplified planning zones; these will enable planning authorities to specify types of development allowed in an area so that developers may then undertake such development without the need for a planning application. The Act also includes power for my right hon. and learned Friend to prescribe a timetable to speed up planning appeals which are dealt with by written submissions. Other initiatives outlined in the Government's response to the fifth report from the Environment Committee, session 1985-86, entitled "Planning: Appeals, Call-In and Major Public Inquiries" (CM 43: December 1986), to improve the efficiency of the planning system in England will in general be matched by initiatives in Scotland appropriate to Scottish circumstances.

Scotch Whisky Industry

21. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding future employment in the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Lang: Since the beginning of December 1986, the Secretary of State has received representations about employment in the industry from six hon. Members, the STUC, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and a person employed in the industry.

East Neuk of Fife

22. **Mr. Henderson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an official visit to the East Neuk of Fife to meet representatives of the fishing industry.

Mr. John MacKay: I have at present no plans for such a visit.

Motorway Construction

23. **Mr. Lambie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase the expenditure on roads in Scotland in the next five years to allow for more motorway construction.

Mr. Rifkind: In cash terms, projected total expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in Scotland for 1987-88 is £125 million compared with £115 million in the current year. Expenditure in subsequent years is planned to maintain a similar progression, and will provide for a significant number of new motorway schemes.

Road Upgradings

24. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of road in Scotland have been upgraded to motorway or dual carriageway standard since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Since May 1979, 78 major trunk road schemes, each costing over £1 million, have been opened to traffic. These have provided 220 miles of new or improved road, including 22 miles of motorway and 86 miles of all-purpose dual carriageway.

Conservation Organisations (Funding)

26. **Mr. Donald Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce provision for funding conservation organisations in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Sir A. Fletcher) on 12 December 1986.

Afforestation (Consultations)

27. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will ask the Forestry Commission to consult the Nature Conservancy Council on all proposals for afforestation in the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland.

Mr. John MacKay: The consultation arrangements on forestry proposals in the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland are kept under review. Any extension of these consultations is a matter for agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council.

Industrial and Employment Prospects

28. **Mr. Craigen** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Scotland's industrial and employment prospects for 1987.

Mr. Lang: Scotland is expected to benefit from the relatively favourable prospects for United Kingdom growth in 1987, but continued job losses in the oil-related sector are expected to remain an adverse factor in 1987. Mainly on this account, economic growth in Scotland may be rather slower than in the United Kingdom as a whole. A more detailed review of recent developments and short term prospects for the Scottish economy is provided in Scottish Economic Bulletin No. 34, which was published on 12 January; a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Blanket Afforestation

29. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the activities of private forestry companies in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on the effects of blanket afforestation on fishing, tourism and the environment.

Mr. John MacKay: Over the past six months the Scottish Office has received over 50 letters on this subject. Most of these have been about planting in the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland.

Large-scale afforestation can be full compatible with the needs of fishing, tourism and the environment if it is properly planned and sympathetically carried out.

Unemployment (Glasgow)

30. **Mr. David Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total number of unemployed people in the GEAR area of Glasgow; what plans he has to reduce this number; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available in the precise form requested. On 13 November 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the number of unemployed claimants in the electoral wards contained wholly or partly within the Glasgow eastern area renewal project was as shown in the following table. This information is available in the Library.

The GEAR project has clearly had a major impact on the East End of Glasgow. While the project itself comes to an end on 31 March 1987, the participants within GEAR will continue to take action within their various responsibilities to improve the economic circumstances of the area. In addition, the extended range of the Manpower Services Commission employment, enterprise and training measures should have an increased impact on unemployment.

Teachers (Pay)

31. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Educational Institute of Scotland on the Main committee report on teachers' pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

32. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Educational Institute of Scotland to discuss teachers' pay; and if he will make a statement.

39. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Educational Institute of Scotland to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Members for Edinburgh East (Mr. Strang) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) by my right hon. and learned Friend today.

Agriculture and Rural Areas

33. **Mrs. McCurley** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are being taken by his Department to secure the future of Scottish agriculture and of Scottish rural areas within the framework of a developing common agricultural policy.

Mr. John MacKay: The Government achieved major success during the United Kingdom presidency of the Community, in securing wide-ranging changes to the common agricultural policy. The Scottish position was, and will continue to be, fully taken into account in such negotiations and in their implementation.

Government support to Scottish agriculture in 1986-87 from my Department and other agencies, will exceed £330 million. This is clear evidence of our firm commitment to the future of this important industry.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration is being given to alternative land use and employment initiatives in rural areas in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend keeps these matters under continuous review.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the farming industry in Scotland regarding Her Majesty's Government's plans for alternative land use and employment initiatives in rural areas.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend maintains regular contact with the farming industry on these and other matters.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

35. Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when next he intends to meet the chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board to discuss its future financing.

Mr. John MacKay: My noble Friend, the Minister of State, meets all health board chairmen regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. His next scheduled meeting with chairmen is on 10 March 1987 when funding of boards will be one of the topics for discussion.

Buses (Deregulation)

36. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of the deregulation of bus services on traffic congestion in city centres.

Mr. Ancram: There has been no evidence in Scotland of any significant congestion caused by deregulation, except in Glasgow where other factors appear to have contributed to problems in the city centre. The traffic commissioner will be holding an inquiry in February to determine what traffic regulation conditions, if any, are required to resolve any continuing congestion problems in Glasgow.

Tree Planting

37. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the area of land planted by trees in Scotland, Wales and England during 1986; and by how much additional acreage he expects to see such plantations develop in 1987.

Mr. John MacKay: The totals of new planting carried out in the year to 31 March 1986, by the Forestry Commission and by the private sector with the aid of grants from the Commission, were as follows:

	Hectares
Scotland	21,330
Wales	792
England	1,230

The estimates of new planting for the year to 31 March 1987 are as follows:

	Hectares
Scotland	22,000
Wales	850
England	1,600

Fishing Industry

38. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to have a meeting with the Scottish fishermen's organisations to discuss the future of their industry.

Mr. John MacKay: I have frequent meetings with representatives of the Scottish fishing industry but have at present no firm plans for our next meeting.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the representatives of the Scottish fishing fleet regarding the required approval for the Russian Klondykers to operate in Falmouth bay; what action he has taken to support the Scottish fishermen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: A number of representations have been received from the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. The granting of licences for klondyking operations in English ports is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My officials have been in regular contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in pursuit of the request from the Scottish fishing fleet for klondyking facilities and I hope that a decision on the matter will be taken very soon.

Manufacturing

40. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many manufacturing jobs have been lost in Scotland since June 1979.

Mr. Lang: The number of employees in employment in manufacturing in Scotland is provisionally estimated to have fallen by 192,000 between June 1979 and June 1986.

Historic Buildings Council

2. **Mr. Fairbairn** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what properties he intends to benefit from his announced increased grant to the Historic Buildings Council.

Mr. Rifkind: I have yet to determine which properties should benefit from the increased resources to be made available for historic buildings grants in 1987-88 but in reaching any such decisions I shall, as usual, be guided by the advice of the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. Martin asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many defendants have appeared in the sheriff courts in Scotland during the past year without legal representatives.

Mr. Lang: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Hospitals (Maintenance)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with health boards on problems of maintenance in hospitals due for replacement by new general hospitals.

Mr. John MacKay: The routine maintenance of all hospital buildings in Scotland is the responsibility of health boards until the property is sold. My Department makes a special allocation of funds for backlog maintenance projects which are carried out in accordance with priorities determined by the board concerned. In addition regular discussions are held between my officials and area maintenance managers on matters relating to the maintenance of the NHS estate in Scotland.

Prisons (Disturbances)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now make it his policy to set up an inquiry team of a judge and three lay assessors to investigate the whole Scottish prison system in view of the recent disturbances at a number of Scottish prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: No. Appropriate steps have been taken to investigate or pursue issues arising from the recent incidents in Scottish prisons.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, in the light of recent disturbances at Scottish prisons, he will consider setting up a highly trained unit of specialists to deal with any future disturbances in order to reduce stress and strain on prison officers and their families.

Mr. Lang: While the Scottish prison service in co-operation with the police has the capability and expertise to deal with the disturbances experienced at Scottish prisons in recent months, I share the concern of my hon. Friend for prison officers and their families. Our arrangements and procedures are constantly under review and I will bear his suggestion in mind.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the additional police and prison costs as a result of the recent disturbance at Peterhead prison; and if he will list these in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Lang: The information is as follows:

	Police £'000	*Prison £'000*
Staff	16	73
Supplies	9	19
Buildings	—	250
	25	342

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has considered what further training should be given to prison officers in self-protection against assault in view of recent disturbances at Scottish prisons, including Peterhead prison.

Mr. Lang: Prison officers are trained in the use of demonstration control techniques to deal with large scale disturbances, and in the use of control and restraint techniques to deal with individual inmates who may be violent or disturbed, where the requirement is to minimise the risk of injury to inmates and staff. The content of training is kept under regular review and will be looked at in the light of recent events.

Prison Officers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Scottish Prison Officers Association regarding the need for increases in the number of prison officers at Scottish prison establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There are regular meetings with representatives of the Scottish Prison Officers' Association at local and national level at which various issues, including staffing levels, are discussed. Representations have been made about staffing levels at individual establishments. The number of prison officers has increased by 17 per cent. to 2,750 over the past six years, while the prison population has increased by 15 per cent.

Peterhead Prison

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of prisoners' places available at Peterhead prison and the number of prisoners housed there in the years 1979 to 1986, giving the details for each year.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is:

Year	*Places*	*Average number of prisoners*
1979	354	274
1980	354	231
1981	354	213
1982	329	197
1983	281	196
1984	281	185
1985	281	188
1986	281	182

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of prison officers employed at Peterhead prison; and whether this is fully up to establishment.

Mr. Lang: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons in Scotland into the recent disturbance at Peterhead prison.

Mr. Lang: As I indicated in my reply of 17 November at c. *53* to the hon. Member, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland has been asked to complete his investigation into complaints about conditions and treatment of prisoners at Peterhead prison, and report to the Secretary of State as quickly as possible. It is for HMCIP himself to decide when his independent investigation is sufficiently complete for the report to be submitted. I know that HMCIP is well aware of the importance and urgency of reporting as quickly as possible.

Prisons (Overcrowding)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland in how many prisons in Scotland there is overcrowding in prison cells; what steps he is proposing to end the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There is at present overcrowding of varying degrees in Aberdeen, Barlinnie, Edinburgh, Greenock, Inverness and Perth prisons and Longriggend remand institution. Phase II of Shotts prison, which will provide 468 new places this summer together with the retention of Low Moss prison should largely eliminate overcrowding provided that there is no significant increase in the inmate population or loss of accommodation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Scottish Fishing Fleet

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on the Scottish fishing fleet of the delay in approving entry into Falmouth Bay for the Russian klondykers to tranship the mackerel catch; and if he will make a statement;

(2) why the members of the Scottish fishing fleet who normally operate in the south-west mackerel box are being denied the right to commence catching; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration is being given to alternative land use and employment initiatives in rural areas.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As the right hon. Member will know, I have been pursuing the reform of the common agricultural policy vigorously in Brussels. The various implications, including alternative land use and the effect on the rural economy remain under active consideration.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a White Paper on alternative land use and employment initiatives in rural areas.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I shall continue to give careful consideration to the best method of keeping all concerned informed about my policies in this and other areas.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with the National Farmers Union on alternative land use and employment initiatives in rural areas.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department has regular discussions with the National Farmers Union about the Government's policies for agriculture and the reform of the common agricultural policy including alternative land use and the implications for the rural economy.

DEFENCE

Scottish Fishing Fleet

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Defence why he has not so far approved the Russian klondyker vessels entry into Falmouth Bay for the transhipment of mackerel; if he will now issue his approval in view of the effects on the Scottish fishing fleet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: This matter is still under consideration.

ENERGY

Fuel Prices

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will have urgent discussions with major oil companies to establish the reason for the increase in prices of fuel at the pumps at stations throughout Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Oil product prices are not set by Government. They are a matter for the oil companies and reflect the cost of supplies and the level of competition in the market.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 January 1987

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General if he will publish a table showing the most recent rates of unemployment in *(a)* all travel-to-work areas receiving regional development grants, *(b)* all travel-to-work areas receiving only regional selective assistance, *(c)* travel-to-work areas which receive no assistance but have rates higher than in *(a)* and *(b)*, and *(d)* travel-to-work areas which receive no assistance but have rates within 2 per cent. of any in *(a)* and *(b)*.

Mr. Lee: Following are tables giving the requested information for travel-to-work areas as at 11 December 1986. Table A shows the 42 travel-to-work areas which have development area status; table B the 57 travel-to-work areas which have intermediate area status; table C the 69 travel-to-work areas that receive no assistance but have rates higher than any in tables A or B; and table D shows the other 55 travel-to-work areas that receive no assistance but have rates within 2 per cent. of any in tables A and B.

Table A

Travel-to-work area	*Number*	*Rate*
Newquay	2,814	27·8
Cumnock and Sanquhar	4,556	26·9
Cardigan	1,677	26·1
South Tyneside	15,608	25·7
Helston	1,636	25·2
Lampeter and Aberaeron	1,181	24·8
Penzance and St. Ives	4,104	23·7
South Pembrokeshire	3,258	23·5
Whitby	1,493	23·2
Holyhead	3,982	22·9
Hartlepool	9,571	22·3
Redruth and Camborne	4,714	22·1
Rotherham and Mexborough	23,131	22·1
Falmouth	2,252	21·9
Middlesbrough	28,764	21·8
Lanarkshire	33,366	21·2
Sunderland	36,182	20·9
Bathgate	9,808	20·6
Arbroath	1,929	20·5
Aberdare	3,841	20·5
Liverpool	102,072	19·8
Bishop Auckland	8,425	19·7
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	6,794	19·2
Dumbarton	5,605	19·1
Merthyr and Rhymney	9,825	18·7
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	12,623	18·4
Wigan and St. Helens	34,306	18·4
Stockton-on-Tees	14,277	18·3
Widnes and Runcorn	11,074	18·2
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	64,361	17·8
Scunthorpe	9,040	17·5
Wirral and Chester	37,824	17·4
Wrexham	7,723	16·9
Workington	4,289	16·7
Pontypridd and Rhondda	10,715	16·6
Corby	3,912	16·6
Dundee	15,709	13·8
Neath and Port Talbot	6,910	13·6
Total	559,351	19·4

Table B

Travel-to-work area	*Number*	*Rate*
Forres	766	25·7
Skye and Wester Ross	1,203	25·3
Sutherland	950	24·1
Western Isles	2,354	24·0
Girvan	876	23·6
Lochaber	1,850	23·2
Pwllheli	1,237	22·2
Fishguard	714	21·9
Invergordon and Dingwall	3,098	21·2
Badenoch	790	21·1
Newton Stewart	705	21·0
Dunoon and Bute	1,627	20·6
Barnsley	15,780	20·0
Doncaster	20,725	19·8
Bodmin and Liskeard	3,862	19·6
Telford and Bridgnorth	11,662	19·2
Porthmadoc and Ffestiniog	1,189	19·1
Campbeltown	834	18·9
Alloa	3,557	18·5
Morpeth and Ashington	8,770	18·3
Stranraer	1,517	18·1
Bangor and Caernarfon	5,004	18·1
Bude	1,039	18·1
Haverfordwest	3,801	17·9
Wolverhampton	24,770	17·8
Llanelli	5,814	17·8
Kirkcaldy	11,596	17·4
Wick	819	17·0
Walsall	25,680	17·0
Hull	30,399	16·8
Gainsborough	2,068	16·6
Rochdale	10,297	16·6
Dudley and Sandwell	44,995	16·5
Dunfermline	8,365	16·4
Bridgend	8,858	16·4
Falkirk	11,094	16·3
Sheffield	46,951	16·2
Bolton and Bury	27,776	15·8
Birmingham	118,952	15·8
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	4,087	15·6
Grimsby	12,258	15·4
Newport	12,558	15·3
Pontypool and Cwmbran	5,666	14·9
Blackburn	9,656	14·8
Plymouth	18,366	14·8
Kidderminster	5,427	14·8
Bradford	30,413	14·8
Coventry and Hinckley	36,035	14·8
Swansea	16,502	14·6
Ayr	7,102	14·4
Stewartry	1,065	14·0
Darlington	6,766	13·9
Manchester[1]	107,986	13·9
Oldham	11,500	13·8
Cardiff	27,901	13·7
Durham	8,650	13·4
Accrington and Rossendale	5,948	13·2
TOTAL	800,230	15·7

[1] Only part of Manchester travel-to-work area has intermediate status.

Table C

Travel-to-work area		*Number*	*Rate*
1	Skegness	2,873	25·0
2	Thanet	8,270	20·5
3	Alnwick and Amble	2,107	20·0
4	Great Yarmouth	8,205	19·3
5	Machynlleth	590	18·8
6	Torbay	8,401	18·5
7	Oban	1,351	18·4
8	Bideford	1,713	18·3
9	Clacton	3,615	18·1
10	Dartmouth and Kingsbridge	1,248	17·7
11	Bridlington and Driffield	3,228	17·7
12	Worksop	4,267	17·6
13	Louth and Mablethorpe	2,216	17·6
14	Buckie	695	17·2
15	Dolgellau and Barmouth	762	17·0
16	Isle of Wight	7,499	16·8
17	Blairgowrie and Pitlochry	1,677	16·7
18	Goole and Selby	4,548	16·6
19	Minehead	1,524	16·5
20	Llandeilo	562	16·3
21	Islay/Mid Argyll	761	16·3
22	Lowestoft	5,224	16·3
23	Scarborough and Filey	4,909	16·0
24	Cromer and North Walsham	2,751	15·8
25	Conwy and Colwyn	4,983	15·8
26	Blackpool	18,728	15·7
27	Annan	1,270	15·4
28	Castleford and Pontefract	8,847	15·4
29	St. Austell	3,555	15·4
30	Chesterfield	11,327	15·4
31	Lancaster and Morecambe	7,492	15·3
32	Folkestone	4,729	15·3
33	Barnstaple and Ilfracombe	3,734	15·3
34	Totnes	952	15·1
35	Peterhead	2,012	15·1
36	Berwickshire	729	15·1
37	Torrington	572	15·0
38	Mansfield	9,140	15·0
39	Lockerbie	600	14·9
40	Launceston	959	14·8
41	Wisbech	2,471	14·7
42	Crieff	517	14·6
43	Wakefield and Dewsbury	16,748	14·6
44	Sittingbvourne and Sheerness	5,660	14·5
45	Brechin and Montrose	1,868	14·3
46	Harwich	1,161	14·2
47	Llandrindod Wells	1,067	14·2
48	Denbigh	1,260	14·2
49	Keswick	453	14·1
50	Horncastle and Market Rasen	1,565	14·1
51	Weston-super-Mare	5,172	14·1
52	Orkney Islands	951	14·1
53	Inverness	5,301	14·0
54	Banff	1,104	13·9
55	Retford	2,786	13·9
56	Lincoln	8,551	13·9
57	Huntly	433	13·8
58	Hastings	6,577	13·8
59	Keith	723	13·8
60	Fraserburgh	852	13·7
61	Bridgwater	3,996	13·7
62	Whitchurch and Market Drayton	1,864	13·7
63	Pendle	4,235	13·7
64	Stirling	4,761	13·6
65	Newton Abbot	3,204	13·6
66	Ludlow	1,514	13·4
67	Thurso	806	13·3
68	Richmondshire	1,590	13·3
69	Elgin	2,074	13·2
Total		247,889	15·6

Table D

Travel-to-work area		*Number*	*Rate*
1	Fakenham	1,439	13·2
2	Northwich	6,093	13·1
3	Newark	3,055	13·1
4	Nottingham	43,720	13·1
5	Huddersfield	10,986	13·1
6	Bridport	955	13·1
7	Southend	31,731	13·1
8	Thirsk	581	13·0
9	Dover and Deal	4,895	12·9
10	Barrow-in-Furness	4,649	12·8
11	Oswestry	1,643	12·8
12	Burnley	5,658	12·8
13	Warrington	9,873	12·7
14	Malvern and Ledbury	2,442	12·7
15	Calderdale	9,992	12·6
16	Peterborough	11,574	12·6
17	Welshpool	850	12·6
18	Canterbury	5,632	12·6
19	Okehampton	558	12·5
20	Truro	2,718	12·5
21	Keighley	3,800	12·5
22	Alfreton and Ashfield	7,140	12·5
23	Monmouth	611	12·5
24	Tiverton	1,173	12·4
25	Milton Keynes	8,878	12·4
26	Newtown	1,022	12·3
27	Beccles and Halesworth	1,670	12·3
28	Grantham	2,692	12·3
29	Gosport and Fareham	6,358	12·3
30	Sleaford	1,321	12·2
31	King's Lynn and Hunstanton	5,072	12·2
32	Portsmouth	19,539	12·1
33	Whitehaven	3,709	12·1
34	Bournemouth	11,826	12·1
35	Stoke	23,248	12·1
36	Derby	17,769	12·0
37	Forfar	1,330	12·0
38	Boston	2,919	12·0
39	North East Fife	2,033	12·0
40	Leeds	40,022	12·0
41	Windermere	724	12·0
42	Burton-on-Trent	7,191	11·9
43	Aberystwyth	1,402	11·9
44	Berwick-on-Tweed	1,109	11·9
45	Carlisle	6,004	11·7
46	Edinburgh	35,606	11·7
47	Thetford	2,353	11·6
48	South Molton	473	11·6
49	Hereford and Leominster	5,062	11·5
50	Hexham	1,571	11·5
51	Brighton	18,585	11·4
52	Southampton	20,255	11·4
53	Medway and Maidstone	24,428	11·3
54	Peebles	536	11·3
55	Swindon	9,965	11·3
Total		456,440	12·2

HOME DEPARTMENT

Woolwich (Prison and Court Complex)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimated cost of *(a)* the new Woolwich prison and *(b)* the associated court complex.

Mr. Mellor: The latest estimated cost of the new Woolwich prison is £63·85 million. The latest estimated cost of the associated court complex is £10·93 million.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the expected start and completion dates of *(a)* the new Woolwich prison and *(b)* the associated court complex.

Mr. Mellor: Advance works for the new Woolwich prison and the associated court complex started in May 1986 and are expected to be completed in May 1987. The main contract for the court complex is due to start in February 1988 and is expected to be completed by April 1990. A further month will be required to bring the court complex into operation. The main contract for the prison is due to start in June 1987 and is expected to be completed mid to late 1991. A further three months will be required after the buildings are handed over before the first prisoners can be received.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local job opportunities he expects to be created by *(a)* the new Woolwich prison and *(b)* the associated court complex.

Mr. Mellor: It is not possible to say precisely how many job opportunities are likely to be created, but direct employment by Woolwich prison may provide 20-25 jobs locally and the court complex about a further 10. Furthermore, in excess of 500 people, many of whom could be locally recruited will be required during the construction work.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about the national crusade against drug abuse launched by President and Mrs. Reagan in the United States of America; and what lessons he has drawn for the United Kingdom in terms of providing additional ideas to assist Her Majesty's Government's drug misuse strategy.

Mr. Mellor: The United States authorities keep us informed about all aspects of their strategy to combat drug misuse. Several components in our drugs policy have reflected lessons drawn from their experience. In particular, we constantly stress that Government action alone is not enough to tackle drug misuse; we need the support and commitment of the entire community.

Licensing Laws

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *292*, when he expects to be in a position to say whether legislation might be introduced to reform the licensing laws in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I cannot yet indicate the possible timing of any such announcement. A Private Member's Bill on this subject has recently been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart).

Police Officers (Widows' Pensions)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he has not approved the agreement reached at the police negotiating board to increase the pensions of widows of police officers who retired before 1956; what is the weekly amount of the increase disallowed and the approximate amount cost of the pension disallowed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 12 January at column *73*.

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the terms of reference and expected timetable of the Home Office review of the forensic science service.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The contribution of the Home Office forensic science service to the investigation and detection of crime is being considered as part of a wide-ranging review of the scientific support required by the police service in England and Wales and how this might best be provided. A separate exercise is about to be undertaken to measure the work being done in the operational laboratories of the forensic science service. The terms of reference for this study are to be discussed with the departmental trade union side shortly. Both reviews are expected to have been completed by August 1987.

Electronic Data Systems

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what investigation is being carried out by the immigration service into advice from staff of Electronic Data Systems, a copy of which has been sent to him by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, about their behaviour when undergoing immigration control;

(2) when he expects to reach a decision as to whether to take legal action against Electronic Data Systems in relation to alleged breaches of immigration rules.

Mr. Waddington: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may expect to receive a reply to his letters of 15 August 1986 and 20 November 1986 which refer to Mr. V. R. Taylor of Rugby.

Mr. Mellor: I regret the delay which occurred in dealing with my hon. Friend's letters. I have written to him today.

News International Plant, Wapping

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made to provide police on duty at Wapping with riot equipment; and if the equipment available includes CS gas, smoke and plastic bullets.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Police officers at Wapping have been provided with the usual protective equipment. Plastic baton rounds and CS have not been made available.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the number of injuries sustained by the Metropolitan police during the News International dispute; and if he will list those injured on a monthly basis and the injuries sustained.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commissioner informs me that up to 9 January, 410 police officers had sustained injuries. The injuries ranged from concussion and cuts and bruises to burns and broken limbs. More detailed information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide details on the total number of police deployed at the News International plant since the dispute began;

(2) if he will list the number of police officers provided by the Metropolitan and City police forces to police the News International plant at Wapping on a daily basis for each month since February 1986 to date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of Metropolitan police officers deployed at the News International plant varies from day to day and hour to hour depending on the public order situation. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that up to and including 31 December 1986 nearly 1·2 million police man hours had been spent by the Metropolitan police in connection with the dispute. Although City of London officers police marches by print workers which pass through the city they are not regularly deployed outside the News International plant itself.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the number of injuries by civilians during the News International dispute; and if he will list those injured on a monthly basis and the injuries sustained.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that this information is not available. Such injuries are not necessarily reported to the police.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will outline the mutual aid arrangements established across the Metropolitan police district to ensure that the operational requirements for police cover have been met during the News International dispute at Wapping;

(2) if he will list the Metropolitan police divisions which have sent officers to Wapping; and what were the numbers of officers sent on each occasion.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that officers from all eight areas in the Metropolitan police district have been deployed in connection with policing the News International dispute. The numbers provided by a particular area on a particular occasion depend on the requirement at Wapping, and other policing requirements elsewhere in the Metropolitan police district. Rest day working and other overtime are options available to senior officers to ensure that operational requirements are met. Records of the number of officers provided by each area or division are not kept centrally, and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of the mutual aid arrangements made with forces outside London to ensure the operational requirements of policing the News International plant at Wapping have been met.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he has not requested any such aid.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the daily cost of policing the Wapping News International dispute in overtime payments; and if he will provide a total cost of overtime necessitated by the dispute.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the daily cost in overtime payments of policing the News International dispute is not available. The total cost of police overtime up to the end of November is estimated at about £4·6 million.

New Prison, Wrexham

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what permanent new employment he expects to be created as a result of his plans to build a new prison at Wrexham; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on what days he first informed Wrexham Maelor borough council and Clwyd county council of his intention to build a category C closed prison for about 600 inmates at Wrexham;

(3) whether he will consider plans for building a smaller prison at Wrexham than at present suggested;

(4) if he is prepared to consider, for the new prison, sites in addition to the one at present under examination at Wrexham, if any are found to be available and generally acceptable.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Dogs (Working Party)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report of the working party set up to consider the findings of the removal of canine faeces projects carried out by the London borough of Barking and Dagenham, the borough of Gosport, the north-west Leicestershire district council and the Rochester upon Medway city council; and whether he intends to offer an extension of the bye-law to other areas.

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received the report on the experimental schemes allowing six local authorities powers to deal with the problem of dog-fouling; and when it will be published.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received this report and, as I stated in replies which I gave to questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) at columns 554-558 on 17 December 1986, we are considering whether the results of the experimental scheme provide a sufficient basis on which to make the bye-laws available for adoption by other local authorities, and expect shortly to announce the conclusions we have reached. The publication of the report will coincide with this announcement.

Nuclear Weapons Convoys

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to issue new guidance on the movement of nuclear weapons convoys to chief fire officers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It has been the long standing policy of this and previous Governments not to comment on methods of transporting nuclear weapons. However, there is continuing liaison between the representatives of chief fire officers and Ministry of Defence staff about the role of the fire service in the handling of incidents involving radioactive materials and guidance to chief fire officers is kept under review.

Police Officers (fatalities)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were killed on duty in 1978 and each year since.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of police officers killed on duty in England and Wales since 1978 is as follows:

	Number
1978	14
1979	10
1980	5
1981	10
1982	13
1983	16
1984	15
1985	7
1986	9

Crime Prevention

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the agencies to be involved in a multi-agency effort to deter and combat crime.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We already actively encourage all agencies and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to identify ways in which they can help to prevent crime. A vast range of projects and initiatives have been introduced or are planned which involve a number of agencies or organisations combining their knowledge, expertise and resources to undertake specific crime prevention activity at national and local level. A good example is our five local demonstration projects where the local authorities, police, probation, local companies and other local agencies, including voluntary groups have adopted a multi-agency approach to crime prevention in their communities.

Community/Police Consultative Group

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the reasons for writing to the Community/Police consultative group for Lambeth on 23 September to say that the Government have allowed the Metropolitan Police (Compensation) Act 1886 to remain on the statute book even though the Government no longer accept the principles upon which it is based; and if he will specify the principles with which his Department disagrees.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *734*]: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the Riot (Damages) Act 1886. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote to the chairman of the Lambeth consultative group in reply to a letter from her enclosing a copy of the group's report on the disorders in Brixton in September 1985. The report contained proposals for amending the 1886 Act. The Act is based on the assumption that riots are the result of a failure to provide adequate policing and that those who suffer damage to their premises or property in the course of a riot should therefore be entitled to compensation from the police fund for the area. As my right hon. Friend's letter explained, we no longer accept these assumptions but have retained the Act because it provides help to small businesses and households in inner city areas which may be vulnerable to riots.

Rule 43

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number and proportion of prisoners held on rule 43 in the Prison Department's south-east region at the end of October in 1976, 1985 and 1986 respectively.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *734-5*]: Figures for 1976 are not available. The information requested for the years 1985-86 is as follows:

Date	*Good Order and Discipline (note 1)*		*Own Protection (note 2)*	
	Number	*Per cent. of south east Region population*	*Number*	*Per cent. of south east Region population*
31 October 1985	37	0·4	218	2·5
31 October 1986	50	0·5	332	3·8

Note 1: These figures exclude women and inmates of youth custody and detention centres for whom figures are not available.
Note 2: These figures exclude women and inmates of youth custody and detention centres and unconvicted prisoners, for whom figures are not available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Peter Wright (Trial Costs)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General, pursuant to the answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column 16, concerning the cost of the Peter Wright case in Australia, if he will give a breakdown of the total cost between (i) travel and subsistence of witnesses, (ii) fees to counsel, (iii) fees to solicitors and (iv) other legal expenses.

The Attorney-General: I shall break down the total cost to public funds to date of the court action in Australia into

two categories: the first, travelling and subsistence for officials, is approximately £55,000; the second, legal fees, is approximately £115,000.

TRANSPORT

Flying (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to ensure that small airfield companies, such as flying clubs, gliding, microlights and parachute clubs, take account of the environmental impact of their activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: No. I am satisfied that the current legislation gives me adequate powers to take account of the environmental impact of operations at small airfields.

Car Count (Modbury-Bigbury)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are involved in the car count on the Modbury to Bigbury road; and at what cost to the taxpayer each year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On the average, two casual enumerators at £2,100 per annum.

M5 (Lane Closure)

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will name the contractor who closed a mile-long section of the M5 on the inner lane of the southbound carriageway immediately before Taunton Deane motorway service area on Sunday 4 January; and if he will investigate why no work was being conducted within that sector.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The lane closure was introduced during Sunday afternoon by Somerset county council to enable essential maintenance work to start early on Monday 5 January. Operations of this nature are best carried out during daylight hours when traffic is at its lightest and lane closure introduced with the minimum disruption to the travelling public.

British Airways

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total amount of money spent and committed for spending by his Department and by British Airways in preparation for the sale of British Airways, showing separately how much has been spent on advertising.

Mr. Moore: As is customary, I shall publish the full details of the costs associated with British Airways privatisation after the flotation has been completed. Advertising costs, in particular, can be subject to last minute changes which would make it inappropriate to publish estimates now.

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the foreign states in which a media campaign has been launched to aid the sale of British Airways, showing the amount in pounds sterling committed in each country.

Mr. Moore: No media campaign has been or will be launched in any foreign state to aid the sale of British Airways.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the positions and functions of those members of staff of his Department who are contributing to the work of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department has contributed in the past to this study but is not actively involved at the present.

M1-M6 Interchange

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now take steps to introduce full lighting and fog detectors at the M1-M6 interchange junction 19.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no immediate plans to light junction 19, which has a relatively good accident record, but the situation is under review.

There are also no plans to provide fog detection equipment at junction 19. As announced on 29 October, trials of differing designs of fog detection equipment will be carried out over this winter and next winter to decide which design best meets the Department's requirements. The new system will then be installed at the 30 fog prone sites on the M25 identified by the Meteorological Office. The work is due for completion in 1990. The effectiveness of the system will be monitored to determine whether it should be used on other motorways.

The ultimate responsibility for safety in fog rests with the drivers themselves.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the chief constable on the circumstances surrounding the accident on the southbound carriageway of the M1/M6 at junction 19 on Thursday 8 January.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Officials are in regular contact with the Leicestershire police at senior and operational level and will together consider what can be learned from the unfortunate series of accidents and if any steps can be taken to reduce the possibility of a repetition.

Ticket Fraud

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions are given to British Transport police with regard to the detection and prevention of ticket fraud; and what is the nature of their relationship in this work with London Regional Transport staff.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is the function of the British Transport police to protect both the general public using the Underground and London Underground staff from crime and th effects of crime. It is also their function to protect and safeguard London Underground's property. They have a duty to assist in the detection and prevention of any offence against the law or against the railway byelaws, including ticket fraud. It will not normally be necessary for staff to seek the assistance of the British

Transport police in order to deal with minor offences of fare evasion, but the police may be called upon by London Underground management by individual members of staff if they believe that assistance is needed, for instance where they believe that there is a risk of violence directed against staff.

Underground (Ticket Checks)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport under what authority British Transport police are undertaking checks at Pimlico and Brixton underground stations on tickets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Transport police officers have not been engaged in checking tickets. The checks referred to have been undertaken by travelling ticket inspectors employed by London Underground Limited during operations to clamp down on fare evasion on this part of the Victoria line. Police have been present in order to reduce the risk of assault on staff carrying out these ticket checks.

Drinking and Driving

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has any plans to introduce mandatory warning labels against drinking and driving on all alcohol containers;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce mandatory signs or posters in premises where intoxicating liquor is sold concerning the dangers of drinking and driving.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I believe the drinks trade is aware of the major contribution it can make in the battle against drinking and driving. A number of useful initiatives have been taken by the trade, one of which involved the circulation of new publicity material for use on licensed premises. I am keen to explore with the trade how its role can be developed further. We have no plans for action on a mandatory basis.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Descriptions Act 1972

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he anticipates bringing forward legislation to repeal the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 and replacing it with a new measure further to protect the consumer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Provision for repeal of the 1972 Act is made in the Consumer Protection Bill which is currently being considered in another place. It is the Government's intention that the entry into force of the repeal of the Act should coincide with that of any order providing for successor arrangements so that there will be no intervening period when no regime applies.

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the Government's intention of seeking repeal of the Trade Descriptions Act 1972.

Mr. Howard: I have received representations from a number of hon. Members and from some trade associations and local authorities.

Time Share Agencies

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place recently between the Government and representatives of time share agencies regarding the possible need for increased consumer protection and greater regulation of the industry.

Mr. Howard: I have exchanged correspondence and held meetings with representatives of time share developers. My Department has also held several such meetings. These discussions have covered both the current situation in the industry and the consumer advice leaflet which my Department will be issuing shortly.

Aid to Industry

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of Stae for Trade and Industry how much has been spent in each year by the Government since 1983 on regional aid to industry to each of the English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and through which agencies this finance was spent.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Figures for calendar years are not readily available, and expenditure is shown for financial years from 1983-84:

Expenditure[1] at Current Prices

£ million

Region	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86[2]*
Northern	127·5	122·2	94·4
North West	101·4	101·6	85·9
Yorkshire & Humberside	35·5	41·9	34·3
East Midlands	17·6	10·1	8·3
West Midlands	—	—	5·5
South West	11·9	13·7	11·8
Scotland	222·4	184·5	204·7
Wales	113·5	141·1	132·1
Great Britain[3]	629·8	615·0	577·0
Northern Ireland	103·0	129·1	145·5
United Kingdom	732·8	745·1	722·5

Notes:

[1] All figures are gross and include payments to nationalised industries.

[2] The Great Britain total does not always equal the sum of the component parts due to rounding.

[3] Figures for 1985-86 are provisional estimates.

The agencies through which this expenditure was spent are as follows:

English Regions

The Department of Trade and Industry and the English Industrial Estates Corporation.

Scotland

The Scottish Office (Industry Department for Scotland), the Scottish Development Agency, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Wales

The Welsh Office (Industry Department), the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development and the Industrial Development Board.

The items included in the expenditure are regional development grants and regional selective assistance under the Industrial Development Act 1982, and expenditure on land and factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation, the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales, and

the Highlands and Islands Development Board. Northern Ireland has a different range of financial incentives available and the items included in the expenditure have been restricted to aids similar to the main forms of regional preferential assistance; these are selective financial assistance payable under part III of the Industries Development (NI) Order 1982, general assistance (capital) grants payable under part IV of the order, and land and factories expenditure.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Office of Fair Trading last investigated petrol prices; and when it next intends to do so.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Dykes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for the index of output in manufacturing industry; and what was the comparable figure six, seven and eight years ago.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested is given in the table.

Index of output of the manufacturing industries (1980 = 100)

October	
1978	108
1979	108
1980	94
1986	106

BTR-Pilkington

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the Office of Fair Trading to complete its consideration of the BTR bid for Pilkington.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Science and Technology

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent steps he has taken to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the United Kingdom in science and technology.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend announced on 6 November that the recurrent grant to universities for 1987-88 will go up by £95 million compared with the grant for 1986-87, an increase of over 7 per cent. and that equipment grant will go up by £6.5 million, an increase of over 6 per cent. This extra money will allow the universities to continue as the main providers of basic scientific research. In addition the science budget for 1987-88 will be £39 million more than in 1986-87, an increase of 6.3 per cent. Since the Government took office in 1979 the science budget has increased by 10.6 per cent. over the rate of general inflation.

My right hon. Friend has also undertaken a number of measures to promote awareness of and competence in science, mathematics and technology across the whole range of educational provision. For a description of these I refer my hon. Friend to the Department's written evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on 4 June 1986 (House of Lords Minutes of Evidence (71-xiv) page 385).

My right hon. Friend's proposals to establish a network of city technical colleges are also designated to strengthen the teaching of science and technology throughout the school stytem.

School Sizes

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what research evidence his Department bases its guidelines for minimum school sizes, as outlined in the White Paper, "Better Schools."

Mr. Dunn: The White paper, "Better Schools", gives a general indication of the size thresholds at which schools of different types can deliver a satisfactory curriculum economically. This is based on curriculum modelling and on evidence from inspections of schools by Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Dr. J. G. Beaumont

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may receive a definitive reply to his letters of 29 September and 4 December 1986 which refer to Dr. J. G. Beaumont.

Mr. Bob Dunn: I replied to my hon. Friend on 13 January.

AIDS

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the occasions on which the Medical Research Council has sought funding for research on AIDS since 1983; and what was the outcome in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 18 December 1986 to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) at columns 666-67.

The Medical Research Council has supported research on AIDS from within its science budget allocation since 1983. They have sought additional funding for this research on two occasions.

In 1985 the council sought £0·5 million a year from 1986-87 to fund an epidemiological research centre to monitor the spread of AIDS in the United Kingdom. The greater part of the cost (£0·3 million) was met by a contribution from the health departments. The council met the remaining £0·2 million from its science budget allocation for 1986-87 onwards (which included £2.5 million new money).

Sacred Heart Primary School, London

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) why he has refused financial approval for the years 1987-88 for the replacement of Sacred Heart primary school in Trott street, Battersea, London; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he plans to reply to the letter of 8 December 1986 from the hon. Member for Battersea concerning Sacred Heart primary school, Trott street, Battersea, London.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Resources for grant-aiding governors' expenditure at aided and special agreement schools, such as Sacred Heart, are limited. Priority is given to projects which provide extra places in areas where there is an overall shortage of places or which take out of use surplus places. Beyond that, it was possible this year to allocate funding to a very small number of the most urgent improvement projects. Sacred Heart was not one of these.

A reply to the hon. Member's letter of 8 December will be sent as soon as possible.

ENERGY

Electricity Supplies (Channel Cable Link)

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, on a monthly basis, the amount of electricity supplied to the Central Electricity Generating Board grid system from France via the Channel cable link since its inception to November 1986.

Mr. Goodlad: The figures are published in table 1 of my Department's publication "Energy Trends".

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, on a monthly basis, the amount of electricity supplied to France from the Central Electricity Generating Board grid system via the Channel cable link since its inception to November 1986.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Coal Imports

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy from which countries coal has been imported during the last 12 months; and what information he has in each case as to the extent to which the United Kingdom price of that coal properly reflects the cost of production, marketing and distribution.

Mr. David Hunt: In the past 12 months coal has been imported from Australia, the United States, Poland, South Africa, West Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium and Colombia. Information on how the delivered price is calculated is not available.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Rother Valley on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *621*, concerning emergency arrangements at nuclear power stations, what is the statutory requirement for emergency arrangements to be rehearsed regularly; what is the typical number of inspectors present during the annual exercise at each location; whether any full-scale exercises have been undertaken in recent years other than those witnessed by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate; whether he has any plans to review the content or frequency of exercises of emergency arrangements; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his replies to the hon. Member for Rother Valley on 27 November 1986, *Official Report*, column *302*, and 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *621*, concerning duly authorised persons and exercises of emergency arrangements at nuclear power stations, what proportion of duly authorised persons at a typical station is associated with each separate shift; what arrangements are made for newly appointed duly authorised persons to participate in annual exercises witnessed by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate in the first year of appointment; with what frequency a duly authorised person participates in such annual exercises; what proportion of annual exercise scenarios include rehearsal of off-site measures to protect the public; with what frequency each manager or deputy manager participates in exercises of off-site measures to protect the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Coal Production

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the present production of the coalfields in view of recent fires at two pits and the consequences for production in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: This is a matter for British Coal, and I shall ask the chairman to write.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United Kingdom Elections

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision he has made for information to be available in local languages at United Kingdom missions abroad on how to vote in United Kingdom elections.

Mr. Eggar: None except in France where newspaper advertisements in English have been accompanied by a French translation as required by French law.

Lie Detectors (GCHQ)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the operation of polygraph lie detectors at Government communications headquarters.

Mrs. Chalker: The first phase of the polygraph pilot scheme undertaken following the recommendations of the Security Commission in its report on the case of Geoffrey Prime (Cmnd. 8876) has been completed. This included the examination of staff of the Security Service and of senior members of GCHQ.

It has been decided to commission some further independent research into the validity of the polygraph. No decision has yet been taken on the starting date for the 2nd phase of the pilot scheme, which would include the testing of a random sample of the staff of GCHQ.

Government Department (Trade Unions)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend the ban on trade unions from the Government communications headquarters to other parts of his Department.

Mrs. Chalker: It is not our intention to extend the measures introduced at the Government communications headquarters beyond those agencies whose primary functions are concerned with security and intelligence.

Lie Detector Tests

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce polygraph lie detector tests in parts of his Department in addition to the Government communications headquarters.

Mrs. Chalker: We have no such plans.

Rape Trial (Perpignan)

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, having regard to the conduct of the British honorary consul in Perpignan and others, he will provide funds for the representation by senior and junior counsel of the two British complainants as co-prosecutors in the trial for raping them of Marc Diaz and Frank Noguera, and for the prompt payment to them of an ex gratia payment in lieu of criminal injuries compensation; if he will provide further funds for the same complainants as co-prosecutors of Mr. Paul Kutner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Successive Governments have confirmed that public funds are not available to assist those engaging in legal proceedings abroad. Complainants must seek legal advice on the availability or otherwise of legal aid in the country concerned. Awards under the criminal injuries compensation scheme are made on an ex gratia basis and apply only to cases arising in Great Britain or on British registered ships or aeroplanes. Charges against Mr. Kutner in the United Kingdom have not been pursued and he has not been charged in France.

Gibraltar

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of his discussions on Gibraltar with the Spanish Foreign Minister on 13 and 14 January.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As provided for in the Brussels agreement of November 1984, the Spanish Foreign Minister and I held a full discussion of differences between our two Governments over Gibraltar, including the issues of sovereignty, as well as ways of promoting co-operation between Gibraltar and Spain. The discussions were held in a positive, friendly spirit as befits two EC partners and NATO allies.

Argentina

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the talks in the United States of America between United Kingdom and Argentinian officials began; what rank of officials are representing the United Kingdom; on what basis the talks are being held; what is the role of the United States Administration; what other countries are involved; what subjects are being discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There have been no such talks.

Mr. Rajendra Ramasamy

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Newham, North-West can expect a reply to his letter regarding Mr. Rajendra Ramasamy sent to the Home Office on 4 November 1986 and passed on to the Foreign Office on 9 December 1986; and when Mr. Ramasamy can expect to receive his student visa.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Ramasamy's application is still being considered. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Kenya (AIDS)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is given by the High Commission in Nairobi to British visitors to Kenya concerning the risk of AIDS in various parts of Kenya.

Mr. Eggar: Advice for British nationals travelling anywhere overseas on AIDS or other infectious and communicable diseases is contained in the pamphlet SA35/1987, "Protect Your Health Abroad", published by the Department of Health and Social Security and freely available from travel agents.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Vacant Land)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) in which areas it is compulsory for local authorities to register vacant land held by them on the public land register;

(2) in which areas it is not compulsory for local authorities to register vacant land held by them on the public land register; and what steps he proposes to take to make this procedure compulsory.

Mr. John Patten: Part X of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 has been brought into operation throughout England. No English local authorities are exempt from its provisions.

London Docklands

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will hold an inquiry into planning applications made by the London Docklands Development Corporation in respect of the royal docks and West Ferry Circus.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend expects to issue shortly his decision on whether or not to call in the planning application for West Ferry Circus that has been submitted to him as a departure from the development plan. There are no applications with the corporation at present to develop land in and around the Royal Victoria, Royal Albert and King George V docks.

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present status of New Town Commission tenants; and what decisions have been reached concerning their future landlords.

Mr. John Patten: Tenants of the Commission for the New Towns at Basildon have exactly the same status as regards security of tenure and the right to buy as they had before the wind-up of the Basildon development corporation last year. No decision has been taken about the future ownership of the new town housing at Basildon, and none will be until the tenants have been fully consulted.

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the disposal of the New Town Commission's assets.

Mr. John Patten: The purposes for which the Commission for the New Towns exists are set out in section 36 of the New Towns Act 1981 (as amended by the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Act 1985) and include the disposal, as soon as it considers expedient to do so, of property transferred to it from former development corporations and any other property held by it. By virtue of section 37 of the 1981 Act (as amended) the commission may not, other than with the general or special authority of the Secretary of State, dispose of any property by way of gift or for a consideration less than the best reasonably obtainable.

Housing Finance

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* for each local authority in England *(a)* the housing investment bid submitted for 1986-87, *(b)* the allocation announced, *(c)* the allocation as a percentage of the bid in each case and *(d)* the 1986-87 allocation in each case.

Mr. Tracey: A table showing this information in the form requested is being prepared and will be placed in the Library shortly.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will bring up to date the table of staffing of the Building Research Establishment given in the reply by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) on 11 June 1984; what is the current shortfall of staff in post compared with the authorised complement *(a)* overall and *(b)* in the science category; and what is the proposed complement for 1987-88.

Mr. John Patten: The manpower allocation for the Building Research Establishment was 771 for 1 April 1986. There were 755 staff in post on 1 April 1986. On that date there were *(a)* overall 16 fewer staff than allowed for in the complement and *(b)* in the science category six fewer staff than in the complement.

The manpower allocation for the Building Research Establishment is 751 for 1 April 1987. There were 742½ staff in post on 1 December 1986. On that date there were *(a)* overall eight and a half less staff than allowed for in the 1 April 1987 allocation and *(b)* in the science category five and a half more staff. The detailed figures are in the table.

Building Research Establishment

	Complement 1 April 1987	*Staff in Post 1 December 1986*
Science category		
Grade 3	1	1
Grade 4	1	1
Grade 5	4	5
Grade 6	16	18
Grade 7	60	61
SSO	90	96
HSO	105	96½
SO	74	71
ASO	22	29
	373	378½
Research officers		
SRO	1	1
Professional and technology category		
Supt. Eng. (Grade 6)	1	1
Supt. Architect (Grade 6)	1	1
Grade 7	10	9
SPTO	20	16½
HPTO	12	13
PTO	18	18
	62	58½
Administration group		
Grade 6	1	—
Grade 7	2	2
SEO	2	2
HEO	5	5
EO	18	18
CO	62	54½
CA	—	5½
	90	87
Information officers		
Senior Information Officers	1	1
Information Officers	4	4
Assistant Information Officers	1	1
	6	6
Librarian	1	—
Assistant Librarian	1	1
	2	1
Graphics Officers		
Graphics Officer III	1	1
Graphics Officer IV	2	1
Technical Grade I	4	5½
Tracer	—	½
	7	8
Personal Secretaries and Typists		
Senior Personal Secretary	1	1
Personal Secretary	18	18½
Typing Manager	4	3
Typists	15	14
	38	36½
Photographers		
Chief Photographer	1	1
Principal Photographer	4	3
Senior Photographer	5	4
	10	8
Other Grades		
Assistant Chief Photoprinter	1	1
Photoprinter I	3	2
Photoprinter II	3	4
Senior Data Processor	3	4
Data Processor	2	2½

	Complement 1 April 1987	Staff in Post 1 December 1986
Senior Messenger	2	2
Messenger	3	4½
Telephonists	5	5
	22	25
Total: Non industrial	615	609½
Total: Industrial	140	133
Total: All grades	751	742½

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the current level of morale, performance and scientific output at the Building Research Establishment; and what proposals he has for the long-term future of this organisation.

Mr. John Patten: The performance and scientific output, which are the best measures of morale at the Building Research Establishment, remain high (in quality and content), as can be judged from the recent annual report (1985-86), a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The establishment has been the subject of a recent study by Sir Henry Chilver and Sir Peter Harrop, which is being considered.

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Building Research Establishment to complete the investigation into the Reema type of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987]: The Building Research Establishment's report on Reema hollow panel system houses (now designated under the housing defects legislation) was published in December 1984, and a copy is in the Library. The BRE's investigations of later, different forms of Reema construction will be covered in its report on large panel buildings generally, likely to be available early this summer.

Princes Risborough Laboratory

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on progress to date in transferring the facilities of the Princes Risborough laboratory to the main Building Research Establishment site at Garston; what financial and staffing resources were allocated for timber research in each of the years 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87; and how the allocations compared with the actual outturn.

Mr. John Patten: Arrangements for the transfer of research facilities of the Princes Risborough laboratory to the main site at Garston are proceeding satisfactorily; transfer should be completed by the end of 1987.

Allocations of direct BRE research staff to timber research in 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 were 37, 36 and 33·2 respectively, while outturns were 32·4 in 1984-85, 35·9 in 1985-86 and are estimated as 32·6 in 1986-87. At full economic cost, BRE's outturn expenditure, including in-house work and that carried out externally, in 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 was £1,781,131, £2,086,951 and £1,943,625 (estimated) respectively.

Previous answers given to similar questions were given in Supply Vote terms.

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what exchanges on environmental issues occur between his Department and the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department and NIREX discuss as necessary issues of common interest, including environmental ones in pursuit of the Government's published policy on radioactive waste disposal.

Camber Castle

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the reasons for the delay in the opening of Camber castle at Rye to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Camber castle is one of the many ancient monuments which are now managed on my right hon. Friend's behalf by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. I understand that it has been undergoing repairs. It is for the commission to decide how much of the castle can be opened to the public and how soon. My hon. Friend may therefore wish to take this up with the chairman, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.

Land Use

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a Green Paper setting out his objectives and policies for long-term change in strategic planning of rural land use, with specific reference to related factors including the cost and quality of rural transport.

Mr. Tracey: I published on 15 September 1986 a consultation paper on the future of development plans. Inter alia, this referred to the arrangements for development planning in rural areas.

Sandwell (House Repairs)

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider the allocation of extra funds to the Sandwell metropolitan borough council under the rate support grant settlement for housing repairs under the Housing Defects Act and subsequent amendment.

Mr. Tracey: The rate support grant is an unhypothecated grant and would therefore be an inappropriate tool for taking account of expenditure by a particular authority on housing repairs.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society to the recent annual meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress and future activities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society.

Mr. Waldegrave: The pilot study on aircraft noise in modern society has not yet completed its report. I

understand that it aims to complete an interim summary report before the May plenary of the committee itself, but that the final report will not be ready for some considerable time. I shall arrange for a copy of the interim report to be placed in the Library when it is published.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Enviroment if he will list the positions and functions of those members of staff at his Department who are contributing to the work of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department is not directly involved in the work of this pilot study. The United Kingdom's contribution to it is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. My Department is represented usually at grade 7 level on the committee itself, which oversees the work of all pilot studies.

Leeds (Urban Programme)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the grounds on which he rejected applications under the urban programme from the Ley Lane Tenants Association and the Broadlea Residents' Action Group, Leeds.

Mr. John Patten: Both these projects were approved on 23 December.

Derelict Urban Areas

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will authorise additional funding to attract private sector interests to participate in approved private-public partnership schemes for the regeneration of derelict urban areas.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's plans for public expenditure on urban regeneration, including support by the way of urban development grant and urban regeneration grant for schemes undertaken by the private sector, are set out in the White Paper on public expenditure which was published yesterday.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the four new urban development corporations; when they will be set up; when they will start work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: An order designating the first of the four proposed urban development corporations, the Trafford Park development corporation, was laid before Parliament on 15 December 1986. My right hon. Friend has appointed consultants to advise him about the other three; for the Black Country, Teeside and Tyne and Wear, and will make the necessary orders as soon as possible after receiving their reports.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many days each of the part-time members of the London Residuary Body have worked since their appointment; and what has been the total remuneration paid to each one.

Mr. Chope: The relevant terms of appointment of each part time member of the London Residuary body are as follows:

Member	*Days per week*	*Rate of Remuneration (from 1 July 1986) £ per annum*
A Blakemore, CBE	2	12,492
J Esling	4	24,984
W J M MacKenzie, OBE	2	12,492
M C Roberts	3	18,738
J Wolkind, CBE	2	12,492
Councillor Sir Peter Bowness	1	6,246

Within these terms of appointment, the day-to-day organisation of work and the method of remuneration are matters for the residuary body. My right hon. Friend has no information on the first part of the hon. Member's question.

Redditch Borough Council

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to the submission from Redditch borough council in respect of housing issues which was made on 27 November 1986.

Mr. John Patten: I hope to be in a position to reply to the chief executive officer, borough of Redditch within the next few days.

Defective Housing

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have received special loan sanctions to re-purchase defective housing in advance of reinstatement schemes being available.

Mr. John Patten: Under the housing defects legislation local authorities decide whether to repurchase, or provide grant for reinstatement, in accordance with the rules laid down in the legislation. They do not need my Department's approval for the exercise of the judgment the law requires of them. Nor do they need special loan sanction to enable them to finance their decisions.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have drawn his attention to problems with roof trusses on dwellings constructed between 1965 to 1975; and what has been his response.

Mr. John Patten: The only local authority which has made representations to me on this subject is the borough of Redditch, to which I shall be replying shortly.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff were employed by his Department in 1979 and for each subsequent year; what estimates have been made on the effect of changes in staff numbers upon the efficiency of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The number of staff employed by the Department of the Environment (Central) since April 1979 is:

	Number
1 April 1979	12,358
1 April 1980	11,654
1 April 1981	10,962
1 April 1982	8,802
1 April 1983	7,813
1 April 1984	6,605
1 April 1985	6,561
1 April 1986	6,521

The overall reduction of 5,837 (47 per cent.) between 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1986 has been achieved by a number of means:

		Per cent.
Hiving off	1,698	29
Privatisation	255	4
Contracting out	338	6
Transfers to other departments	1,141	20
Other savings	2,405	41
	5,837	100

The 2,405 "other savings" reflect a sustained drive to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

Chief Radiochemical Inspector

Mrs. Roe asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the annual report of the Chief Radiochemical Inspector.

Mr. Waldegrave: I received the second annual report of Her Majesty's Radiochemical Inspectorate from the Chief Radiochemical Inspector today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Inner London Education Authority

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take to bring the Inner London education authority in line with other local authorities by making its members subject to disqualification following surcharge and audit action.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has today laid before the House an order under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1985 which will extend audit related disqualification provisions to the members of the Inner London education authority, thus bringing it into line with elected representatives in all other local authorities. The order will provide for ILEA members themselves to be disqualified following audit action, and will also apply disqualification to

any disqualified persons who at any future date seek election to the Inner London education authority.

any persons who become disqualified in future, even if as a result of actions taken before the date of this order.

any persons disqualified as a result of action taken after the date of this order.

It will not disqualify members of the authority by reason of certificate issued against them before the order comes into operation until such time as they cease to be members of the authority.

The order also includes two minor unrelated, miscellaneous provisions.

Rates

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about regional variations in levels of rates, and especially between London boroughs and county councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope [*pursuant to his reply* 12 January 1987, c. *37*]: Comparisons of rate poundages between London and the rest of the country are complicated by the special arrangements for the payment of block grant in London and by the separate London resource equalisation scheme. Average rate poundages in London at 168p are therefore lower than the average rate poundage in the non-metropolitan areas—211p. Average domestic rate bills in London are, however, higher at £485 than in the non-metropolitan areas — £377 — because of the higher rateable values in London. The Government do not accept that it is sensible to expect ratepayers in different parts of the country to pay widely different prices for equivalent levels of local services. Our proposals for a community charge will remove this anomaly.

For business ratepayers, large and unpredictable changes in rate bills from year to year, unrelated to the value of services provided, may be more damaging than the absolute level of rate payments. Our proposals for a uniform business rate poundage, linked to inflation, will allow businesses to plan with more confidence.

PRIME MINISTER

Mid-Kent Constituency

Q101. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to pay on official visit to the Mid-Kent constituency.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

State Security

Q124. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to her answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *728*, why she will not establish an inquiry into allegations that members of the security services conducted surveillance on Government Ministers in the 1970s under the code name Oatsheaf; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary during the debate on 3 December 1986 at column 959.

Engagements

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lie Detectors (GCHQ)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if there has been any change in Her Majesty's Government's policy on the use of lie detectors at Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham.

The Prime Minister: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received today from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Universities

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister whether it was with her authority that Mr. Tony Fairclough, chief scientific administrator at the Cabinet Office, advocated making a few universities internationally competitive as centres of excellence in selected areas of sciences; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: In advocating greater selectivity and concentration of resources for scientific research in higher education, Mr. Fairclough was fairly representing the view of the Government that there needs to be greater concentration and selectivity of research activities in order to strengthen international competitiveness and make the most effective use of resources. The University Grants Committee, with the encouragement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, is already implementing a more selective policy for research funding in the universities.

Government Communications Centre

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister when the new Government communications centre in Whitehall will be completed.

The Prime Minister: There is no centre of the type described in the question.

The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) is undertaking a number of enhancements to their telecommunications network, spread over a five year period.

The Whitehall central branch exchange (CBX) modernisation is in the second phase of the relevant five year plan. Eight new CBX area exchanges are being introduced between 1985 and 1990.

A large tandem exchange, the London tandem, is used to support the Government telephone network (GTN) and the CBX. This exchange will also be modernised with replacements in two stages, which are planned for 27 July and 23 November this year.

Inner Cities

Mr. Freeson asked the Prime Minister if she will describe the duties of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Employment relating to the implementation of Government policies concerned with the regeneration of the inner cities.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has responsibility for the inter-departmental urban programme which targets specific grant resources on urban areas to support a range of initiatives to stimulate enterprise, improve the environment and encourage self-help. He also has responsibility for other programmes and initiatives which aim to attract private investment and regenerate hard-pressed urban areas, including urban development corporations, urban development grant, derelict land grant and the new urban regeneration grant, and "Estate Action", an initiative to tackle the problems of urban housing estates.

My noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment oversees the work of the five city action teams in the inner city partnership areas to improve the contribution of relevant Government programmes, including those of his Department and the Manpower Services Commission, Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment to meet the Government's urban policy objectives. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment is responsible for an inter-departmental inner city initiative involving eight task forces promoting enterprise and employment opportunities at neighbourhood level.

Alcohol (Expenditure)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Prime Minister what estimate can be made of the annual total expenditure on alcohol in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: Consumer expenditure on alcoholic drink in the United Kingdom was estimated to be £15·8 billion in 1985.

Nationalised Industries

Miss Maynard asked the Prime Minister what rules govern the acceptance of paid consultancies by chairmen of nationalised industries.

The Prime Minister: The chairmen of nationalised industries are subject to the terms and conditions laid down in their letters of appointment. In general, acceptance of any outside appointment needs to be approved by the Secretary of State of the sponsor Department concerned, who must be satisfied that the chairman will continue to give sufficient time to his duties with the board, and that there is no conflict of interest. In the case of some nationalised industries, the Secretary of State is required by statute to satisfy himself from time to time that the chairman has no such financial or other interest as is likely to affect prejudicially the exercise and performance of his functions as a board member.

SCOTLAND

Teachers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current situation as regards teachers in Scottish schools.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) by my right hon. and learned Friend on Wednesday 14 January 1987.

Ministers (Factory Opening Ceremonies)

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all of the factory opening ceremonies at which

Scottish Office Ministers have been present in their official capacity since 1979, with the dates of each opening ceremony.

Mr. Rifkind: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Jobs

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the numbers and percentages of jobs lost, or gained, in Scotland between June 1979 and December 1986, or the latest month for which figures are available, in *(a)* all industries, *(b)* all manufacturing industries, *(c)* all service industries, *(d)* shipbuilding and repairing, *(e)* metal goods, engineering and vehicles, *(f)* mechanical engineering, *(g)* electrical electronic engineering and instrument engineering, *(h)* health, education and person social services, *(i)* retail distribution and *(j)* banking, insurance and finance.

Mr. Rifkind: Information about job gains and losses is not available from the Department of Employment's statistics, but an indication of the net changes can be seen by comparing levels of employment at June 1979 and June 1986, the latest date for which estimates are available.

Comparable Scottish estimates of the numbers of employees in employment in the shipbuilding and repairing, mechanical engineering, electrical and electronic engineering and instrument engineering industries are not available for June 1979 or June 1986. The available information is given in the following table.

Employees in employment in Scotland: net changes between June 1979 and June 1986

1980 SIC	Industry	Net change	
		Number	Per cent.
0-9	All industries and services	−216,000	−10
2-4	All manufacturing industries	−192,000	−32
6-9	All services industries	+34,000	+3
3	Metal goods, engineering and vehicles	−76,000	−30
93-99	Education, health and other services	+31,000	+8
64 65	Retail distribution	−9,000	−5
8	Banking, insurance and finance	+33,000	+27

Expenditure Programmes

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing (i) estimated outturn for 1986-87, (ii) estimated outturn for 1986-87 expressed in real terms at 1987-88 prices and (iii) planned expenditure for 1987-88 for each of the expenditure programmes within his responsibility.

Mr. Rifkind: The information on the programmes within my responsibility is as follows:

£ million

Programmes	Estimated Outturn (1986-87)[1]	Estimated Outturn 1986-87 (real terms)[2]	Planned Expenditure 1987-88[1]
Agriculture, fisheries and food	189	196	186
Industry, energy, trade and employment (excluding tourism)	344	357	257
Scottish Block Tourism	13	13	13
Roads and transport	582	604	601
Housing	637	661	696
Other environmental services	618	641	610
Law, order and protective services	566	587	627
Education	1,959	2,032	1,956
Arts and libraries	80	83	82
Health and personal social services	2,464	2,556	2,605
Other public services	112	116	118
Local authority current expenditure not allocated to services	—	—	124[4]
	—	—	—
Total Scottish Block[3]	7,030	7,294	7,431
Nationalised industries' EFLs	241	250	87
Total expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland[3]	7,805	8,098	7,961

[1] Figures have been taken from table 3.16 of the 1987 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cm 56).

[2] The real terms figures are the cash figures adjusted by the GDP deflator (1987-88 = 100).

[3] Figures have been rounded to the nearest £ million and therefore do not necessarily sum to the totals. Estimates of outturn are liable to change as more information becomes available.

[4] Includes £50 million earmarked for local authority current expenditure on education.

Water Fluoridation Act 1985

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to date to implement the provisions of the Water Fluoridation Act 1985 in Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: Departmental circulars were issued to the health and water authorities in Scotland in December 1985. The authorities were advised to engage in informal discussions, but not to enter any formal arrangements for fluoridation schemes until further guidance was issued by the Departments. Circulars now being prepared give detailed guidance on the implementation of the Act, including a model form of agreement between the authorities and a comprehensive code of practice on the technical aspects of fluoridation.

Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Awards

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of each firm, or individual, in the Banff and Buchan constituency who received a European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund award for livestock in the years 1979 to 1986, showing each award and year received separately;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of each firm or individual in the Banff and Buchan constituency who received a European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund award for livestock and livestock products in the years 1979 to 1986, showing each year and each award separately;

(3) if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount of European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund awards to individual fish processing firms in the Banff and Buchan constituency for the years 1979 to 1986, showing the amount of the award and the name of the recipient firm;

(4) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of the firm and the amount of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund award granted to meat processing firms in the Banff and Buchan constituency in the years 1979 to 1986, each year shown separately;

(5) if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount and names of all fishermen who have received European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund awards in the years 1979 to 1986 for newly built vessels in the Banff and Buchan constituency;

(6) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of the firm, or individual, who received a European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund grant in the years 1979 to 1986 within the Banff and Buchan constituency for crops, other than cereals, showing the amount of each grant and the year received;

(7) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of the firm and the amount of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund award granted to cereal companies in the Banff and Buchan constituency in the years 1979 to 1986, showing each year separately;

(8) if he will list in the *Official Report* the name of the firm and the amount of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund award granted to poultry processing firms in the Banff and Buchan consitituency for the years 1979 to 1986, showing each year separately;

(9) if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount and the names of all fishermen in the Banff and Buchan constituency who have received a European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund grant in the years 1979 to 1986 for modernisation or re-engining of vessels, showing each name and amount separately.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is not readily available in the form requested. As the final answer will be rather lengthy I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange to place the information in the Library of the House.

Livestock Loan Scheme

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is satisfied with the current operation of the livestock loan scheme for crofters.

Mr. John MacKay: Demand for assistance under the scheme has been very low over the last 10 years and the future of the scheme is currently under review. The Highlands and Islands Development Board is better placed to offer assistance and for some time now potential applicants have been referred to that body.

WALES

Higher Education

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is able to announce his decisions on local authority higher education provision in 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Having consulted the Welsh Joint Education Committee and the Welsh Counties Committee I have decided that the advanced further education quantum for 1987-88 should be set at £34·1 million. This represents a 10 per cent. increase between 1985-86 and 1986-87. However, I have decided that £300,000 of the quantum should be used to fund the following selective initiatives:

Development of in-service training courses to increase the supply of Welsh medium secondary school teachers;

Development of arrangements for the commercial exploitation of institutions' facilities and expertise;

Development of provision for continuing education and professional up-dating (PICKUP).

The Wales Advisory Body has agreed to invite local authority institutions to submit competitive bids under these headings and to advise me on the distribution of the £300,000.

I have received advice from WAB on the planned disposition of academic provision and the number of student places on higher education courses in local authority colleges in Wales. The WAB proposals provide for a groth of nearly 1 per cent. between estimated enrolments of 13,528 full-time equivalents in 1986-87 and target student numbers of 13,636 for 1987-88. The proposals provide for a continued emphasis to be given to courses in science, engineering and other vocational disciplines and for sub-degree and part-time provision to be protected.

The WAB has also provided advice on how the AFE quantum, net of the £300,000 for selective initiatives, should be distributed between local authorities, and I have also consulted the WJEC and the WCC about this. The proposals for distributing the quantum are related to the proposals for target student numbers for 1987-88 by institution, mode of attendance and subject; and they allow additional funding for degree and postgraduate courses. Following a review of funding for the mono-technic colleges, WAB has recommended that Dyfed and Gwynedd should continue to receive some cash protection for 1987-88 in respect of the College of Librarianship Wales and the Normal college Bangor.

I have decided to accept the WAB's advice on academic provision and student numbers and on the methodology for distributing the quantum. The local education authorities have been informed of these decisions and of their individual allocations.

Copies of a note explaining the methodology by which the AFE quantum for 1987-88 is being distributed have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

MSC Schemes

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those taking part in the Manpower Services Commission sponsored schemes in Wales are *(a)* over 50 but under 60 years of age and *(b)* over 60 years of age.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Comprehensive information is not available in the form requested. The only information held centrally relates to the enterprise allowance scheme, on which, according to December 1986 statistics, 11·8 per cent. of participants in Wales are aged between 45 and 54 and 3·5 per cent. are aged between 55 and 65. Information relating to the ages of participants on other schemes is available only for Great Britain as a whole.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether there are any Welsh-based Manpower Services Commission schemes which operate in England.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No.

Milk Quotas

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many milk producers have left the farming industry in each of the Welsh counties since the introduction of the milk quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The number of registered milk producers in each of the Welsh counties since March 1983 is given in the following table:

Number of registered milk producers

	1983			
	March	*June*	*September*	*December*
Clwyd	1,174	1,174	1,174	1,174
Dyfed	4,027	4,021	4,013	4,011
Gwent	431	431	429	427
Gwynedd	673	672	671	673
Mid, South and West Glamorgan	356	357	355	357
Powys	606	610	610	611
WALES	7,267	7,265	7,252	7,253

Source: Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales.

Number of registered milk producers

	1984			
	March	*June*	*September*	*December*
Clwyd	1,167	1,166	1,163	1,135
Dyfed	4,000	4,004	4,000	3,931
Gwent	425	423	421	414
Gwynedd	666	661	661	635
Mid, South and West Glamorgan	357	354	353	348
Powys	608	605	603	583
WALES	7,223	7,213	7,201	7,046

Source: Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales.

Number of registered milk producers

	1985			
	March	*June*	*September*	*December*
Clwyd	1,123	1,116	1,111	1,107
Dyfed	3,903	3,889	3,849	3,839
Gwent	410	406	404	402
Gwynedd	629	624	617	611
Mid, Glamorgan South and West Glamorgan	346	336	333	331
Powys	579	573	567	560
WALES	6,990	6,944	6,881	6,850

Source: Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales.

Number of registered milk producers

	1986		
	March	*June*	*September*
Clwyd	1,120	1,120	1,123
Dyfed	3,854	3,829	3,817
Gwent	404	402	397
Gwynedd	612	606	598
Mid, South and West Glamorgan	341	339	338
Powys	560	559	552
WALES	6,891	6,855	6,825

Source: Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will introduce amendments to present legislation to prevent loss of milk production to Wales through sales of milk quotas.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the figures for the amount of milk quotas sold by Welsh producers to producers outside Wales, and the amount of quota bought by Welsh

producers from outside Wales, and the net loss or gain of quota to Wales, since the scheme came into operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Movement of quota in and out of Wales as recorded by the Milk Marketing Board during the period 1 April 1985 to 17 November 1986 has been as follows:

	North Wales	*South Wales*
In	+3·1 million litres	+2·7 million litres
Out	−4·1 million litres	−6·9 million litres
Net Loss	−1·0 million litres	−4·2 million litres
Loss as percentage of total quota	−0·2 per cent.	−0·4 per cent.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales by what means is it possible for milk quotas to be reallocated separately from the land to which it was originally attached.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Quota may be transferred separately from the land to which it is attached through a temporary reallocation by a purchaser within a production year, or as a result of quota made available through an authorised outgoers' scheme.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the decrease in production of milk in each of the Welsh counties since the introduction of the milk quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Sales of milk off farms for each of the Welsh counties for the last three financial years have been as follows:

Milk Production (Million Litres)

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Clwyd	319·3	298·8	299·0
Dyfed	980·3	909·8	916·0
Gwent	146·7	134·6	137·2
Gwynedd	103·3	93·1	92·2
Mid, South and West Glamorgan	89·7	81·9	82·0
Powys	140·8	127·6	129·6
WALES	1,780·1	1,645·8	1,656·0

Source: Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales.

Education

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of Welsh school-leavers entering full-time degree courses at university in 1986.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information in respect of school leavers in the academic year 1985-86 is not yet available. Survey results for 1984-85, however, indicate that 2,520 school leavers intended to enter full-time degree courses at universities. This figure excludes those who intended to enter full-time degree courses at polytechnics or BEd. teacher training courses.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of Welsh candidates passing three or more A-levels in 1986.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information supplied by the Welsh Joint Education Committee indicates that 28·4 per cent. of all candidates taking WJEC A-level examinations in the summer of 1986 passed three or more A-levels.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of Welsh pupils gaining grade C or above in all O-levels in 1986.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information, as supplied by the Welsh Joint Education Committee, indicates that the proportion of attainments of grade C or above in all O-level and alternative syllabus subject entries in the 1986 summer examinations was 48·6 per cent.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh students in maintained schools sat examinations in the following O-level subjects, at WJEC, in 1985: art and design, commerce, geology, German, Italian, religious studies, Welsh language, Welsh literature, engineering, Welsh 03 and general science.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information, as supplied by the Welsh Joint Education Committee is as follows:

O-level candidates[1] in maintained schools

	Number
Art and Design	11,395
Commerce	1,544
Geology	1,073
German	1,475
Italian	61
Religious Studies	748
Welsh Language	1,711
Welsh Literature	1,255
Engineering[2]	2,717
Welsh 03	2,578
General Science	157

Notes: [1] Including entries for alternative syllabus examinations.
[2] Comprising engineering drawing, engineering workshop practice and graphical communication.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of the estimated maximum exposures of members of the public in respect of Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, showing *(a)* the dose equivalent for each year of operation, expressed in millisieverts and *(b)* the average dose equivalent of the 10-year period ending in each recent year, expressed in millisieverts; what changes are expected to take place concerning maximum exposures of members of the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: *(a)* The data are all available in MAFF annual reports entitled "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The dose equivalent (m Sv) to the critical group resulting from the discharge of liquid effluent into Lake Trawsfynydd for each year of operation is as follows:

Prior to 1968	*Too low to measure accurately*
1968	0·2
1969	0·2
1970	0·15
1971	0·25
1972	0·3
1973	0·3
1974	0·35
1975	0·4
1976	1·05

Prior to 1968	*Too low to measure accurately*
1977	0·15
1978	<0·1
1979	<0·1
1980	<0·15
1981	0·55
1982	0·35
1983	0·25
1984	0·32
1985	0·21

(b) The average annual dose equivalent (m Sv) for 10-year periods (assuming the dose for 1978 and 1979 to be 0·1 m Sv each year and the dose for 1980 to be 0·15 m Sv).

1968-77	*0·34*
1969-78	*0·33*
1970-79	*0·32*
1971-80	*0·32*
1972-81	*0·35*
1973-82	*0·35*
1974-83	*0·35*
1975-84	*0·34*
1976-85	*0·32*

We do not expect any major change to the exposures of members of the public, but the situation will be kept under review.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information is available to his Department of the additional exposure to radiation of members of the public expected to arise from the prospective new nuclear power station at Trawsfynydd; what assessment level would be used in the safety case for a new station in respect of the maximum radiation exposure of any member of the public during normal operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: No decisions have been taken by the CEGB about the timing of the closure of the present station at Trawsfynydd, or about whether it should be replaced.

If any further nuclear power station were to be constructed at Trawsfynydd, any additional exposure to members of the public would depend on the type of station constructed and it is not possible to make a precise calculation at this stage. However, the criteria recommended by ICRP will be fully taken into account in assessing the safety case for any such power station.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department provided information to the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee relevant to the study of liquid radioactive discharges from Trawsfynydd nuclear power station mentioned in the sixth annual report of that body; what reports his Department has received of that study; whether any further studies have been undertaken or commissioned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information was provided by the Directorate of Fisheries Research at the request of the Department, which received a copy of the relevant paper. The directorate carries out an extensive programme of monitoring in the aquatic environment around major United Kingdom nuclear sites, including the effects of liquid radioactive discharges from Trawsfynydd nuclear power station. The results are published annually by MAFF in a series of reports entitled "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles".

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy on 12 December, *Official Report*, column 317, concerning the estimated doses of radioactivity received by critical groups in respect of Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, he will state *(a)* what members of the public comprise the critical group mentioned, *(b)* what pathway or pathways of exposure are relevant for members of that critical group and *(c)* the annual number of sample measurements used to derive the estimated annual doses received by members of that critical group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: *(a)* The members of the public comprising the critical group are anglers who consume rainbow and brown trout caught in the Lake.

(b) The relevant pathway is internal irradiation from the consumed fish.

(c) Approximately four samples per year each of rainbow and brown trout are analysed on behalf of the Department to assess the critical group dose. Each sample consists of approximately six individual fish. Further, more numerous analyses are carried out by the site operator as a condition of authorisation. The results of these two programmes are in agreement. The actual numbers of samples vary somewhat from year to year depnding on availability.

"A Good Old Age"

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales what action he intends to take to improve services for elderly people in Wales in the light of consultation on his Department's document, "A Good Old Age"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In the light of the encouraging response to "A Good Old Age" I intend to establish a programme of demonstration projects in order to stimulate new developments in the provision of care for elderly people in Wales. I have issued a circular today which invites local authorities, health authorities and other organisations to review the scope for further development of their services in the light of "A Good Old Age" and to submit bids for this programme. I intend to make available for this programme sums of up to £1 million in 1987-88, up to £2 million in 1988-89 and up to £4 million in 1989-90. I also intend to continue this special funding during the following five years in the light of available resources. A copy of the circular has been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Official Unionist and Democratic Unionist Parties

15. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish evidence available to him of links between the Official Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties and paramilitary organisations.

Mr. Tom King: Where there is any evidence to suggest that a member of a political party, or anyone else, may be involved with a proscribed organisation the police will make inquiries and, where appropriate, bring charges against those concerned. It is no part of the Government's or the Royal Ulster Constabulary's duties to investigate the legitimate activities of constitutional political parties.

Security

16. **Mr. Stuart Bell** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Since 27 November, three civilians and one policeman have died as a result of the security situation in the province. Sixy one people died in Northern Ireland last year as a result of the security situation and one person has already died this year.

The security threat remains high and there are no grounds for complacency, but the courageous and determined efforts of the security forces are continuing to yield results. During 1986 a total of 655 people were charged with serious offences, including 12 with murder and 215 weapons, 29,000 rounds of ammunition and almost 5,400 lb of explosives have been recovered. Over 531 people were convicted during 1986 of offences related to terrorism.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

18. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and what was discussed.

Mr. Tom King: I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland to discuss policy issues of common concern in the security field. It is not my practice to give details of the timing of these meetings.

Devolved Government

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for promoting devolved government in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tom King: The Government have proposed a round table conference on devolution and in advance of this is ready to facilitate informal talks among the parties. There is a wide measure of support for a return of greater responsibility to Belfast from Westminster and we have received a number of representations in support of this.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the level of co-operation regarding cross border security since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Scott: While security co-operation on the ground between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana was already good, the Anglo-Irish Agreement has resulted in increased contact and co-operation at all levels between the two forces. Three joint working parties established by the two police forces have now reported and a special ministerial meeting within the framework of the intergovernmental conference was held on 31 October to review progress in implementing, the ability of the security forces to combat cross-border terrorism will be significantly increased.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Paymaster General what is his latest estmate estimate of the number of people actively seeking work who are classified as unemployed; and what percentage of the total unemployed this represents.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. According to the results of the labour force survey, in Great Britain in the spring of 1985, there were 2·81 million people without a job who had sought work in the week prior to the survey compared with 3·13 million claiming benefits as unemployed people. Further details are contained in an article published in the October 1986 issue of *Employment Gazette* entitled "Unemployment figures: the claimant count and the Labour Force Survey".

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General if he will publish a table for each region Scotland and Wales, showing the net loss or gain in numbers, and by percentages in *(a)* employees, *(b)* manufacturing employment, *(c)* the service sector and *(d)* construction for the years June 1979 to June 1983 and June 1983 to June 1986.

Mr. Lee: The information is given in the following table. The comparisions with June 1986 are based on the slightly revised estimates of employees in employment for that date which were released earlier today. Therefore they do not correspond in all respects to figures given to the hon. Member previously.

Net Change in Employment June 1979 to June 1983

June 1979 to June 1983 Employees in Employment:	*All*	*Manufacturing*	*Services*	*Construction*	*Self Employed*
South East					
thousands	−391	−338	10	−49	79
per cent.	−5	−10	0	−13	12
East Anglia					
thousands	−14	−28	26	−5	15
per cent.	−2	−14	6	−12	19
South West					
thousands	−83	−73	6	−13	67
per cent.	−5	−17	1	−15	46
West Midlands					
thousands	−299	−272	−10	−12	36
per cent.	−13	−28	−1	−12	26
East Midlands					

June 1979 to June 1983 Employees in Employment:	All	Manufacturing	Services	Construction	Self Employed[1]
thousands	−129	−121	11	−9	41
per cent.	−8	−20	1	−13	33
June 1983 to June 1986 Employees in Employment:					
South East					
thousands	260	−136	435	−25	224
per cent.	4	−9	9	−8	31
East Anglia					
thousands	74	23	53	1	26
per cent.	11	13	12	4	28
South West					
thousands	54	8	59	−9	45
per cent.	4	2	6	−11	21
West Midlands					
thousands	78	−10	97	1	12
per cent.	4	−1	9	0	7
East Midlands					
thousands	91	12	93	−5	3
per cent.	6	2	12	−1	2

[1] Regional estimates of self employment are not available for separate industries.
[2] Less than 1,000.

Net Change in Employment June 1979 to June 1983

June 1979 to June 1983 Employees in Employment:	All	Manufacturing	Services	Construction	Self Employed[1]
Yorkshire and Humberside					
thousands	−239	−208	−2	−19	33
per cent.	−12	−29	0	−17	26
North West					
thousands	−374	−277	−66	−20	10
per cent.	−14	−29	−4	−15	5
North					
thousands	−191	−119	−35	−22	14
per cent.	−13	−29	−5	−27	18
Wales					
thousands	−145	−102	−20	−14	2
per cent.	−14	−32	−3	−23	2
Scotland					
thousands	−203	−160	−8	−20	19
per cent.	−10	−26	−1	−13	12
June 1983 to June 1986 Employees in Employment:					
Yorkshire and Humberside					
thousands	5	−40	79	−3	69
per cent.	0	−8	8	−3	41
North West					
thousands	−41	−60	33	−4	56
per cent.	−2	−9	2	−3	25
North					
thousands	20	−21	55	−5	19
per cent.	2	−7	9	−8	21
Wales					
thousands	−30	−11	2	−5	28
per cent.	−3	−5	0	−10	22
Scotland					
thousands	−12	−32	42	−1	24
per cent.	−1	−7	3	0	13

[1] Regional estimates of self employment are not available for separate industries.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General what is his estimate for each regional area of the numbers and percentages of net job losses or gains by each industrial category, including categories of service employment and the construction industry, from June 1979 to June 1986.

Mr. Lee: The figures are given in the following tables. They are based on the slightly revised estimates of employees in employment for June 1986 which were released earlier today. Therefore they do not correspond in all respects to figures given to the hon. Member previously.

Net changes in employment between June 1979 and June 1986

thousands

	South East		East Anglia		South West		West Midlands		East Midlands	
	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change
Employees in Employment[1]										
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	−7	−9	−8	−20	−2	−4	−2	−7	−3	−9
Energy and water supply (1)	−19	−15	−4	−33	−6	−19	−12	−22	−19	−20
Metal manufacturing and chemicals (2)	−48	−23	11	58	3	7	−48	−29	−20	−25
Metal goods, engineering and vehicles	−273	−28	−10	−11	−35	−16	−217	−33	−38	−23
Other manufacturing (4)	−136	−23	−6	−6	−33	−19	−17	−8	−31	−11
Construction (5)	−74	−20	−4	−10	−21	−25	−12	−12	−9	−13
Distribution, hotels and catering (6)	87	6	20	15	−2	−1	8	2	27	11
Transport and communications (7)	−46	−7	18	42	−4	−5	−12	−12	3	4
Banking, insurance and finance (8)	281	35	20	48	45	42	53	46	19	27
Other services (9)	123	6	21	12	28	6	39	8	53	15
Self Employed[2]	303	47	41	52	112	77	48	34	44	38

[1] Figures in brackets denote the divisions of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.
[2] Regional estimates of self employment are not available for separate industries.

Net changes in employment between June 1979 and June 1986

	Yorkshire and Humberside		North West		North		Wales		Scotland	
	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change	Change	Per cent. change
Employees in Employment[1]										
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	−5	−16	−1	−6	−2	−13	−2	−9	−17	−35
Energy and water supply (1)	−38	−32	−20	−29	−22	−29	−23	−37	−19	−26
Metal manufacturing and chemicals (2)	−78	−48	−58	−38	−41	−40	−47	−45	−34	−41
Metal goods, engineering and vehicles	−94	−38	−141	−35	−71	−39	−52	−43	−76	−29
Other manufacturing (4)	−75	−25	−137	−33	−28	−22	−15	−16	−83	−31
Construction (5)	−22	−20	−24	−18	−27	−33	−20	−32	−21	−14
Distribution, hotels and catering (6)	19	5	4	1	−26	−11	−2	−1	−7	−2
Transport and communications (7)	−11	−10	−33	−20	−7	−11	−15	−26	−25	−19
Banking, insurance and finance (8)	43	44	35	22	16	28	16	36	33	27
Other services (9)	27	6	−38	−6	39	12	−16	−5	34	6
Self Employed[2]	104	78	66	31	33	43	30	24	43	27

[1] Figures in brackets denote the divisions of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.
[2] Regional estimates of self employment are not available for separate industries.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General what is his estimate for each regional area and the United Kingdom as a whole of the number of employees in second jobs in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1986.

Mr. Lee: Estimates from the 1979 and 1985 labour force surveys of the number of persons in employment with a second job as an employee are presented in the following table:

Persons in employment[1] *with a second job as employee*

Thousands

Region	1979	1985
Northern	12	23
Yorkshire and Humberside	25	47
North West	36	58
East Midlands	28	38
West Midlands	23	46
East Anglia	12	20

Region	1979	1985
South East	90	183
South West	25	52
Wales	11	13
Scotland	26	37
Northern Ireland	[2]	11
United Kingdom	297	529

[1] Estimates relate to the spring of each year. Figures for 1985 include those on government schemes, whereas 1979 only include those on schemes if reported as in employment.
[2] Less than 10,000.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General what is his estimate for each parliamentary constituency of the United Kingdom of *(a)* the numbers of net job losses or gains since June 1979, *(b)* the numbers of manufacturing job losses or gains and *(c)* the numbers of construction job losses or gains; and if he will express each figure as a percentage of the numbers employed in June 1979 in each sector.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information requested is not available.

The Department's statistics for parliamentary constituencies monitor only net changes in total employees between census dates and do not provide an industry breakdown. The available census estimates for constituencies are from the September 1981 census of employment. Estimates from the following census, relating to September 1984, are not yet available.

MSC Schemes

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the participation of people between the ages of 55 and 65 years in Manpower Services Commission sponsored schemes.

Mr. Trippier: I have agreed that there should now be common age limits for men and women on Manpower Services Commission employment and training programmes. The cut-off age for participation in MSC measures is the 65th birthday.

The latest date for entry to programmes is determined on a programme-by-programme basis, depending upon the aims and objectives of the programme concerned.

Information on cut-off ages for entry for each scheme is as follows:

	Age
Community Programme	63
Voluntary Projects Programme	63
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	*65
Job Training Scheme	65
Training Grants for Employers	65
Wider Opportunities for Training Programme	65
Restart	65

* From 1.2.87.

Mr. D.E. Thomas asked the Paymaster General what proportion of those taking part in Manpower Services Commission sponsored schemes in England are *(a)* over 50 but under 60 years of age and *(b)* over 60 years of age.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not available in the form requested. However the latest scheme-by-scheme information available shows:

Enterprise Allowance Scheme—in England 12·5 per cent. of entrants are aged 45-55 and 5·3 per cent are aged 55-65.

Community Programme—in Great Britain 7 per cent of participants are aged 45-55 and 3 per cent. are aged over 55.

Voluntary Projects Programme—in Great Britain 8 per cent. of participants are aged 50 and over.

Jobstart—in Great Britain 5·9 per cent. of allowance recipients are aged 45-54, 1·8 per cent. are aged 55-59 and 0·4 per cent. aged 60-64.

Adult Training Schemes—the information is not available nationally.

Information is not kept on the ages of people counselled under the restart programme or entering restart courses or jobclubs.

Health and Safety

Mr. Hoyle asked the Paymaster General when the names and addresses of companies where major accidents, as defined by regulation 2(1) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984, will be published by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Trippier: There is no intention to publish the names and addresses of companies where major accidents, as defined by regulation 2(1) of the CIMAH regulations, have occurred.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Employment when the information about major accidents sent by the Health and Safety Executive to the European Commission, as required by regulation 5 of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984, will be published.

Mr. Trippier: There is no intention to publish information about major accidents sent by the Health and Safety Executive to the European Commission under regulation 5 of the CIMAH regulations.

The European Commission will set up a register containing certain details of all major accidents notified to it by the member states, including the United Kingdom. The information in this register will be made available to the competent authorities in each member state so that they may benefit from the exchange of information and take account of any lessons to be learnt.

Foreign Nationals

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Paymaster General if his policy of allowing foreign companies to recruit, without work permits, specified numbers of foreign nationals to work in the United Kingdom permits such companies to employ, in addition to their quota, people of dual nationality, including British citzenship, whether recruited in the United Kingdom or abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The conditions of the work permit scheme apply to all foreign nationals who are subject to immigration control, with the exception of certain categories as set out in paragraphs 31 and 33 of the statement of changes in immigration rules, laid before Parliament on 9 February 1983 under section 3(2) of the Immigration Act 1971. It is incorrect to say that Her Majesty's Government have a policy whereby foreign companies are permitted to recruit a specified number of

foreign nationals without work permits. People who have British citizenship, even if dual nationals, have the right of abode here and do not require a work permit.

Availability for Work Test

Mr. Nicholls asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the operation of the availability for work test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: The procedural changes which I announced on 28 October 1986 and which are based on experiments conducted last summer are now operating in the majority of our benefit offices.

The procedures are designed to meet criticism from the Public Accounts Committee of shortcomings in checking on the longstanding requirement that benefit should be paid only to unemployed claimants who are available for work.

It is too soon to assess the effectiveness of the new procedures in determining benefit entitlement.

Peckham (Task Force)

Ms. Harman asked the Paymaster General (1) how many new jobs have been created by the task force initiative in Peckham;

(2) how many of the new jobs created by the task force in Peckham have been filled by people resident in Peckham;

(3) how many more jobs he expects to be created as a direct result of the task force initiative in Peckham;

(4) how much of the money allocated to the task force initiative in Peckham has already been spent;

(5) what is the cost per job of each job created by the task force initiative in Peckham;

(6) what are the new jobs created by the task force initiative in Peckham.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987, c. 54-55]: It is not possible to provide specific answers to all the hon. Member's questions because they require a detailed evaluation of the inner cities initiative which has no yet been carried out. The initiative was announced in February 1986 and the north Peckham task force was not in place with its small office and staff until 8 May 1986. The north Peckham task force has made considerable progress towards its objectives including job creation and, improving the employability of local residents.

The task force has established contacts and is working with a wide variety of local community organisations, the local authority and with the private sector. A plan has been drawn up as a framework for action in tackling the problems of the area. The plan includes a number of projects designed to increase employment and improve the employability of local people, which are being worked up as a matter of priority. These include:

(a) the establishment, in co-operation with a major clearing bank, of a grant and loan scheme for local small businesses;

(b) a scheme in conjunction with the MSC and the Industrial Society to give young people access to enterprise training and on-going encouragement and support with a view to encouraging self employment;

(c) creating local jobs through a scheme tackling home security problems on local council estates. A first project now under way is the improvement of lighting and external security on the north Peckham estate;

(d) the establishment of a shop run as a co-operative by the local community on the Gloucester grove estate;

(e) creation of workshop start-up units from disused garages on a local estate;

(f) support for provisions of customised employer-based training for 100 local people;

(g) improvements to two adult education institute branches to enable training capacity to be increased (benefiting an additional 20 north Peckham residents), and a training course for 15 disadvantaged local residents to be recommenced.

A substantial number of other projects are at various stages of development. The task force is also working closely with the private sector, other Government Departments and statutory and voluntary agencies in the area to unlock all available resources and to ensure that they are targeted to maximum effect. We are attaching high priority to the introduction of community programme work experience opportunities to the people of north Peckham which has in the past been severely limited by local political opposition.

The task force was instrumental in securing a grant of £850,000 from the Department of the Environment's estates action for a crime prevention and environmental improvement package for the Gloucester grove estate.

A secondee from the voluntary sector has just joined the task force to work with unemployed alienated young people.

No specific allocation of funds to individual task forces has been made. They are intended to improve the targeting of all Government expenditure in their areas. Total central Government expenditure in the north Peckham area was estimated to be £6·4 million in 1985-86. To date some £72,000 has been committed to projects in the north Peckham task force area out of specific inner city initiative funds. Other projects under development, including those described above, are expected to require resources out of the same specific funds totalling some £600,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest Relief

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers who are not married claim mortgage interest relief on the same property; and what is the additional cost to the Exchequer of the mortgage interest relief enjoyed by the second person in all such cases.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 8 December 1986, at column 85.

Hansard Press

Ms. Harman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when new technology will be introduced at the Official Report Press;

(2) if retraining will be available for those copyreaders at the Official Report Press whose jobs will be affected by the introduction of new technology.

Mr. Brooke: New technology, which is regarded in the printing industry as referring to computer-assisted typesetting and associated techniques, was introduced at the Official Report Press (Hansard Press) in January 1981.

Any further change which could affect jobs, including those of copyreaders, will be discussed with representatives of the trades unions involved. Such discussions would include the scope for retraining.

European Commission

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) by what means he proposes to inform the House of a payment of own resources made in advance at the demand of the European Commission, following the decision of the European Court of Justice in case 93/85; and whether the House will be given the opportunity of expressing an opinion on the circumstances which have given rise to the need for the advancing of payments before the transfer is made;

(2) whether, since the decision of the European Court of Justice in case 93/85 is contrary to the Government's contention that advance payments of own resources to the European Commission require specific parliamentary approval, the United Kingdom intends to propose in the Council of Ministers the amendment or annulment of articles 10 and 11 of Council regulation 1891/77, so far as they involve an absolute liability to make such payments and impose a penalty for late compliance;

(3) what estimate he had made of the extent to which current cash flow problems of the Community are likely to give rise to demands for advanced payments of own resources in the present European Community budgetary year.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Incomes

Mr. Clay asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in the average real net incomes of the working population since May 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Computer Contracts

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to exclude from consideration for Government computer contracts those firms which have been found guilty of infringing immigration laws.

Mr. Brooke: In order to secure value for money for the taxpayer the Government seek to ensure that the firms with which they deal are capable of fulfilling their commitments. Judgment in this context would naturally embrace proven breaches of the law.

European Community (Funds)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the payments received from the European Community from each of the structural funds and from the European steel and coal Fund from 1975 for each year for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland; and if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the money received by Scotland from the European social fund.

Mr. Brooke: Information concerning Community receipts by territorial areas within the United Kingdom, and individual projects and programmes benefiting from these receipts, is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. A breakdown of United Kingdom receipts by receiving Departments (including the Scottish Office) and by type of expenditure (for example, the regional development and social funds) is contained in table 3.3.3 of the public expenditure White Paper published on 14 January (Command 56-II, page 71). Information on total United Kingdom receipts from the structural funds is also contained in table 3.3.2 of the White Paper (page 70).

European Commission Budget

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the most up-to-date figures for the United Kingdom contribution to the European Economic Commission budget in each year from 1975 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1986 prices.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Departmental Computer Network

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of the contract being put out to tender for the Government data network; which firms have tendered for the contract; and which firms have been short-listed.

Mr. Brooke: The Government data network project is now at the specification stage.

A statement of service requirement will be issued shortly to five consortia:

Cable and Wireless with ICL;
Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) with British Telecom;
Electronic Data Services (EDS) with Northern Telecom;
Plessey with CAP;
Racal Milgo with SCICON.

The consortia have a month to produce proposals. These will be valuated and a shortlist produced. Further and more technical discussions will be necessary to agree memoranda of agreement before tendering and award of contract, which is targeted for September this year.

The early stage of this project and the nature of the procurement leading to a service contract means that a contract value cannot yet be given.

Invisible Earnings

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the actual and the proportionate contributions to the United Kingdom's invisible earnings of the consulting engineering profession during the course of the last financial year.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

I shall answer this question shortly.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Alcohol (Health Warnings)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he has any plans to introduce mandatory health warning labels on all alcohol containers;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce mandatory signs or posters in premises where intoxicating liquor is sold concerning the health risks involved in drinking.

Mrs. Currie: We have no plans to do so. It is not the use but the misuse of alcohol which causes harm.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will direct local offices of his Department to publish weekly in local newspapers a notice to advise potential claimants of the additional heating allowance whether the week is a qualifying week or not a qualifying week.

Mr. Major: Local offices have been directed to publish advertisements in their local newspapers this week inviting potential claimants to apply for extra help with their heating costs. The situation will be reviewed next week.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, for the week 5 January to 11 January, the average daily temperatures for each weather station designated for measuring temperatures for exceptionally severe weather payments; and what was the lowest recorded temperature for each station during that week.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to improve the arrangements for payment of severe weather assistance in Wales.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now introduce emergency regulations to give additional severe weather heating allowance to the elderly and people on low incomes.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 January, at column 132.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to publicise the new severe weather payments; on what date the new leaflet will be published and where the new leaflet will be placed for public information.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: Details of the new arrangements for extra help with heating costs because of exceptionally cold weather are contained in leaflets and posters which are being distributed to the Department's local offices this week.

In accordance with the reply which I gave to the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 January at column 132, these leaflets and posters will be made available through appropriate outlets. These may include unemployment benefit offices, job centres, health centres, GPs' surgeries, community and religious centres, social services departments, housing benefit offices, advice bureaux, libraries, welfare organisations, gas and electricity showrooms and in more isolated areas, supermarkets and other shops. In addition, advertisements, including a claim form, will appear in national and local newspapers and freesheets and publicity will be sought on local radio and television.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a list of the weather stations not included in the list of those used for calculating severe weather payments, indicating which of them had *(a)* minimum night temperatures of minus 1·5 deg or below on any night, *(b)* daily mean temperatures of minus 1·5 deg or below and *(c)* weekly mean temperatures of minus 1·5 deg or below for the week 5 January to 11 January inclusive.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: The information requested is not provided to the Department. There are over 500 weather stations which supply this information to the Meotorological Office, but I understand there is often a considerable delay, up to about six weeks, in doing so.

Young People in Care

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish such details as are available to him on the number of young people in care, or subject to care orders, who have absconded in each local authority area in each of the past three years and to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The numbers of children and young people in care who, on 31 March, had absconded for more than one week from residential accommodation are given in the table for 1982, 1983 and 1984 for each local authority.

Children and young people in care who absconded from residential accommodation by local authority at 31 March, 1982 to 1984

	1982	*1983*	*1984*
Cleveland	0	0	1
Cumbria	0	0	0
Durham	2	7	6
Northumberland	1	0	1
Gateshead	0	0	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	1	3	2
North Tyneside	2	1	0
South Tyneside	0	1	0
Sunderland	3	0	2
Humberside	4	2	4
North Yorkshire	2	0	1
Barnsley	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	2	1
Rotherham	0	0	0
Sheffield	2	4	1
Bradford	5	2	2
Calderdale	2	0	1
Kirklees	2	5	3
Leeds	0	1	0
Wakefield	0	0	0
Cheshire	9	1	3
Lancashire	7	7	4
Bolton	0	0	0
Bury	4	3	1
Manchester	25	25	18
Oldham	3	5	1
Rochdale	3	1	0
Salford	5	2	3
Stockport	2	[1]2	0
Tameside	2	1	[1]1
Trafford	3	5	0
Wigan	1	1	2
Knowsley	0	0	2
Liverpool	24	26	21
Sefton	7	7	1
St. Helens	0	0	0
Wirral	3	4	1
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	1
Shropshire	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0
Birmingham	61	48	48
Coventry	11	2	8

	1982	1983	1984
Dudley	1	1	3
Sandwell	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	0
Walsall	5	3	3
Wolverhampton	3	2	2
Derbyshire	0	0	0
Leicestershire	1	2	2
Lincolnshire	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	1	0	1
Nottinghamshire	5	4	2
Bedfordshire	4	3	1
Berkshire	5	4	7
Buckinghamshire	1	2	2
Cambridgeshire	4	2	3
Essex	9	6	4
Hertfordshire	0	2	0
Norfolk	0	1	1
Oxfordshire	1	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0
Camden	[1]1	1	1
Greenwich	2	3	4
Hackney	5	4	2
Hammersmith	1	4	5
Islington	[1]7	[1]7	[1]7
Kensington	0	0	0
Lambeth	9	16	15
Lewisham	14	1	3
Southwark	10	3	11
Tower Hamlets	[1]2	[1]2	[1]2
Wandsworth	[1]3	[1]3	4
Westminster	0	0	0
City of London	0	0	0
Barking	2	3	2
Barnet	1	4	1
Bexley	1	1	0
Brent	4	1	1
Bromley	0	1	0
Croydon	0	3	1
Ealing	0	0	1
Enfield	5	2	3
Haringey	2	5	2
Harrow	0	0	0
Havering	0	1	1
Hillingdon	3	4	1
Hounslow	2	4	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	1	0	0
Merton	1	0	0
Newham	5	3	1
Redbridge	0	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	1	2	0
Sutton	0	0	0
Waltham Forest	3	3	0
Dorset	1	0	0
Hampshire	3	3	5
Isle of Wight	0	0	0
Kent	[1]1	1	2
Surrey	2	7	4
East Sussex	0	5	2
West Sussex	0	0	1
Wiltshire	1	0	3
Avon	12	10	10
Cornwall	0	0	0
Devon	0	1	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	1
Somerset	0	0	0
ENGLAND	341	308	267

[1] Estimated from information for earlier years.

Abortions

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of abortions carried out in each health authority area for each of the past five years and to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The numbers of legal abortions to women resident in each regional and each district health authority in England and Wales are published in table 24 of "Abortion Statistics, series AB Nos. 8-12", copies of which are in the Library.

Figures on the numbers of legal abortions performed in Wales and in each regional health authority in England to women resident in the United Kingdom are shown in table 20 of the same publications. Statistics on the number of legal abortions carried out in each district health authority are not published for reasons of maintaining confidentiality.

Surrogate Motherhood (Abuses)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received any further representations concerning possible abuses of the Surrogacy Arrangements Act by surrogate motherhood agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: None since I replied to my hon. Friend's question on 21 October 1986, at column *860*.

The consultation document "Legislation on Human Infertility Services and Embryo Research" invites views, inter alia, on extending restrictions on the operation of surrogacy agencies.

Hospitals (Coal)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what experiments are being conducted within the National Health Service in the use of imported coal for heating hospitals; and what guidance his Department has issued to health authorities on this subject;

(2) if he will make it his policy that the National Health Service should purchase only British coal for use in hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may expect to receive a definitive reply to his letter of 24 October which refers to the Motor and Cycle Trades Benevolent Fund.

Mr. Lyell: I replied to my hon. Friend today.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may expect to receive a reply to his letters of 31 October and 11 December which refer to Mr. N. Smith of Rugby;

(2) when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may expect to receive a reply to his letters of 12 November and 11 December 1986 which refer to his constituent Mrs. Sheila Denney;

(3) when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth may expect to receive a reply to his letter dated 11 November which refers to his constituent Mr. Thomas O'Carroll.

Mr. Lyell: I replied to my hon. Friend yesterday.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the hon. Member for Rugby and

Kenilworth may expect to receive a reply to his letters of 30 October and 11 December 1986 which refer to Mrs. Hopkinson of Rugby.

Mrs. Currie: I replied to my hon. Friend on 12 January.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he now makes of the cumulative effect on public expenditure *(a)* in aggregate and *(b)* broken down by component of changes in social security each year since 1979.

Mr. Major: Information on the increase in public expenditure on social security since 1979-80 is set out in successive public expenditure White Papers. Information for 1979-80 is given in table 3.12 of "the Government's Expenditure Plans 1986-87 to 1987-88" (Cmnd. 9428) and similar information for 1980-81 is contained in table 3.15 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1986-87 to 1988-89" (Cmnd. 9702). For 1981-82 and succeeding years, the information can be found in table 3.15 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90" (Cmnd. 56).

Medical Students

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many students entered medical school in the United Kingdom in each of the last seven years; and what information he has on comparable figures in France, West Germany and Italy.

Mr. Newton: The numbers of students entering medical school in the United Kingdom in each of the past seven years are as follows:

Academic Year	*Medical School intake*
1980-81	4,010
1981-82	4,072
1982-83	4,154
1983-84	4,108
1984-85	4,125
1985-86	4,093
1986-87	[1]4,137

[1] Provisional.

Comparable figures are not readily available for the other countries.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures available for the percentage of gross domestic product spent on health, health expenditure per head of population, number of practising doctors per 100,000 of the population and hospital beds per 1,000 population for the United Kingdom; and what information is available on comparable figures in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and the EEC on average, the United States of America and Sweden.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have the information that is available as soon as possible.

Health Statistics

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures on life expectancy, infant mortality rates, and numbers on sickness benefit as a percentage of working population in the United Kingdom; and what information is available on comparable figures in West Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, and the European Economic Community average.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have the information that is available as soon as possible.

AIDS

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider compensation for the families of haemophiliacs who die as a result of contracting the AIDS virus through blood transfusions; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to compensate those haemophiliacs who have been infected with AIDS by Factor VIII brought from the United States of America.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: There is no state compensation scheme for those who, like haemophiliacs infected with the AIDS virus, unfortunately suffer adverse effects from their medical treatment. Compensation may be awarded by the courts in cases where negligence has been proved. Compensation for the families of haemophiliacs who die from AIDS infection may similarly be awarded by the courts.

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will estimate the number of haemophiliacs currently infected with the AIDS virus through blood transfusions.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 November 1986, at columns *199-200*. These are the most recent figures available for haemophiliacs who have been found to be HIV antibody positive.

The transmission of HIV to haemophiliacs was through the use of blood products in their treatment and not through blood transfusion. Blood products used by haemophiliacs are now heat treated to inactivate HIV.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what date he advised health authorities, when deciding on the disposal of land or buildings, to take into account any plans for the development of services for those suffering from AIDS.

Mr. Newton: The requirement for health authorities to take into account other health service needs and developments before disposing of properties is a standing one which has been included in the National Health Service "Handbook on Land Transactions" since 1977.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he proposes to reply to the three questions from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about hospital waiting lists, due for answer on 10 December 1986.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him yesterday.

Diabetics

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make disposable needles and syringes available to diabetics.

Mrs. Currie: If disposable needles and syringes are considered necessary for a patient's treatment, they may be supplied through the hospital service. The possibility of making them available on general practitioners' prescription is under review.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will exempt from prescription charges adults suffering from cystic fibrosis.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so.

Drug Users (Services)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services over what period his Department has allocated £17·1 million under central funding to improve services to drug users.

Mrs. Currie: The first grants under the central funding initiative for the development of local services for drug misusers were approved in late 1983. The Department is now determining the last few applications for grants. In the majority of cases grants are made for a period of three years.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list his Department's obsolete circulars which have been cancelled, indicating in each case the date it was first issued, whether the circular has been succeeded by another more up to date one, or whether the circumstances to which it applied no longer pertain.

Mrs. Currie: I have today placed in the Library a list of the 531 circulars which have been cancelled. The date of issue is apparent in every case from the reference number, except for the HSC(IS) series, which was published in 1974 and 1975. The cancellation of these circulars does not necessarily imply any change in policy, although many of them gave specific time-related guidance which is now out of date. All future circulars will contain a review date on which they will either be reviewed or cancelled. I have also placed in the Library a list of the 398 circulars which are still extant.

Pensioners

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table providing the latest available figures for the number of retirement pensioners resident in each parliamentary constituency in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lyell: Information about retirement pensioners can be provided for Great Britain or for England, Scotland and Wales separately, but not for smaller areas of the country.

Hypothermia

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners in Hull died of hypothermia and co-related illnesses indicating which in the months November 1985 to April 1986.

Mrs. Currie: There were five deaths to pensioners registered in the Hull registration sub-district during that period, with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate. This is irrespective of whether hypothermia did or did not appear as an underlying cause. (Pensioners are defined as males aged 65 years and over and females aged 60 years and over). From the material available it is not possible to identify deaths from co-related diseases.

Local Offices

Mr Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the social security offices which have closed for either a whole day or days, or parts of a day or days, each month in the last year, in each case indicating the cause.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hospitals (Computers)

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received as to the adequacy of the budgets for the computer facilities which are being required in newly developing hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: None that appear to relate to what my hon. Friend seems to have in mind. The allocation of resources for such a purpose would in any case be a matter for the district and regional health authorities concerned.

Hospital Parking (Solihull)

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the planned levels of car parking facilities at the new Solihull district general hospital.

Mrs. Currie: Car parking facilities are being provided within the Department's recommended guidance contained in DHSS circular DS 97/71, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the actions he has taken since 24 December 1985 to bring into operation breast cancer screening systems nationwide.

Mrs. Currie: The Government will be making an announcement on breast cancer screening in the near future.

Benefits

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the numbers and proportion of unemployed persons who are not in receipt of any social security benefit.

Mr. Lyell: At 14 August 1986 the total number of unemployed claimants was 3,168,100. Of these 520,548

(16·43 per cent.) were not in receipt of unemployment benefit or supplementary benefit (though some may have had other benefits, for example, child benefit).

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Steen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Department's estimates of the number of acres of land currently used for agriculture which will no longer be used for that purpose in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement as to the change of use which he envisages, in a percentage breakdown.

Mr. Jopling: The total area of agricultural land, including rough grazing, as recorded by agricultural censuses, has been tending to decline for many years as land as been utilised for forestry, housing, roads and other purposes. I have no detailed estimates of the precise pattern of change for each of the next three years as this will depend on many factors, including the demand for land for these non-agricultural purposes.

Agricultural Policy

Mr. Spearing asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a Green Paper setting out the options open to Her Majesty's Government, both within and outside the current regulations determining the common agricultural policy of the European Economic Community, in their strategic policy for agriculture within the United Kingdom, with particular reference to policies that *(a)* encourage good husbandry, *(b)* promote levels of employment and economic activity in rural areas and *(c)* conserve the natural and man-made rural environment, and enhance good management of uplands and the national parks.

Mr. Gummer: I already seek to ensure that the public are fully aware of the options open to the Community and to the United Kingdom as a member of the Community.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the positions and functions of those members of staff of his Department who are contributing to the work of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department has not made any input into this study.

Pelagic Fisheries

Mr. Powley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the Fisheries Ministers have yet completed their review of the restrictive licensing arrangements in respect of the pelagic fisheries; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Fisheries Ministers have given thorough and detailed consideration to the restrictive licensing arrangements for the main mackerel and herring fisheries in the light of the current and prospective situation in the fisheries and of the views submitted by fishing industry organisations in response to a consultative paper issued by the Fisheries Departments in October 1985. We have reached the following conclusions.

The quota management difficulties experienced prior to the introduction in July 1980 of restrictive licensing arrangements for purse seiners and freezer trawlers have substantially eased reflecting both the overall reduction in the number of such vessels in the United Kingdom fleet and an increase in the available catching opportunities. Since 1980, the number of purse seine vessels in the pelagic fleet has declined from 59 to 50, whereas all 26 freezer trawlers, then licensed to fish for pelagic species, have left the fleet. For the last five years, not all the quotas available to the United Kingdom for mackerel and herring have been fully taken up; in 1986 it is estimated that, despite the operations of the freezer trawlers provisionally licensed in 1985, the United Kingdom's main pelagic quotas were 15 per cent. under utilised in total. These quotas have now been further increased for 1987. Consequently, while we believe that the special licensing restrictions on purse seiners and freezer trawlers in the pelagic fisheries should, given the catching power of such vessels, continue for the time being over and above the more general system of pressure stock licensing introduced in 1984, we have concluded that it would now be right to make certain modifications in their detailed application.

First, we have decided that in future pelagic licences for purse seiners and freezer trawlers should be interchangeable, thus allowing the balance of the fleet to adjust itself more effectively over the longer term to the situation in the fisheries and the needs of the market. However, given the strong evidence that a limited increase in catching capacity could lead to a fuller uptake of the quotas without undermining the viability of the existing fleet, and the very sharp decline since 1980 in the number of freezer trawlers compared with the change in the number of purse seiners, we have also decided to make available straight away a total of five new pelagic licences for such vessels. Two of these will be assigned to the two freezer trawlers which have been operating in the fisheries since 1985 on a provisional basis. Decisions on the three further freezer licences will be taken following consideration of all applications for such licences received by the Fisheries Departments before 1 March 1987.

Finally, the number of licences available for purse seiners and freezer trawlers for the pelagic fisheries will be reviewed annually to take account of any changes in the level of quotas available as well as their utilisation.

DEFENCE

Airborne Warning and Control System

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Defence which version of the Boeing airborne warning and control system aircraft has been ordered for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The E-3A aircraft to meet the Royal Air Force's airborne early warning requirement will be based upon the latest production standard.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the positions and functions of those members of staff of his Department who are contributing

to the work of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation committee on the challenges of modern society pilot study on aircraft noise in a modern society.

Mr. Freeman: My Department contributes representatives to each of the four sub-groups of the pilot study. In addition to the central staff divisions concerned, representratives attend from Royal Aircraft Establishment, Pyestock, the RAF Institute Community and Occupational Medicine and RAF Strike Command.

Military Data Network

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the contract for the new proposed military data network; which firms have submitted bids; and which firms have been shortlisted.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

Anthrax

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Defence if parts of the United Kingdom other than Gruinard were used for testing anthrax in connection with weapon research.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

Radiation

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 8 December, *Official Report*, column 88, if he will *(a)* outline marine monitoring for radiation undertaken by his Department and *(b)* give the precise co-ordinates for the position of the Russian submarine sunk off the Scillies in 1970.

Mr. Stanley: My Department conducts marine environmental monitoring at Royal Navy bases in the United Kingdom, at the Holy Loch and at RN bases abroad under British jurisdiction. As stated in my reply to the hon. Member on 8 December, at column 88, my Department has not conducted any checks for radiation leaks from the Soviet submarine that sank off the Scilly Isles in 1970. I understand that the Soviet submarine sank in the vicinity of 48° 30′ N, 19° 45′ W.

Trident

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, *Official Report*, 12 January, the figure of £2,750 million contractually committed to Trident includes the £820 million already spent on Trident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes. The figure of £2,750 million committed to Trident includes the £820 million already spent.

DROPS

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the selected demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system MMLC truck designs proposed by Foden and Scammell in 1982 provided sufficient engine power to pull the fully laden LMLC trailer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The Foden and Scammell original proposals provided a number of engine options and powers allowing a selection fully adequate for the DROPS vehicle and trailer configuration envisaged.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the need for the demountable rack off-loading and pickup system was first formally identified by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The DROPS requirement was first formally endorsed in August 1982.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence when funds for the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system were first put into his Department's budgeted expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: 1982.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the shortcomings identified by his Department in the Boughton's 1982 demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system proposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The Boughton system proposals in 1982-83 though competent in many respects fell short of those of its competitors both technically and economically. It would not be normal practice to disclose details of tender offers and assessments. The firm was afforded the opportunity of constructive debriefing after the competition.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what requirements on stacking flatracks was included in the 1985 specification against which the definitive demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipment was tendered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The 1985 specification required that empty flatracks could be stacked for storage and transit.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what part the issue of flatrack stacking played in Multilift's 1982 demountable rack off-loading pick-up system proposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c.. *504*]: Flatrack stacking was fully considered as requested in the statement of requirements in all main contractor proposals to which Multilift contributed.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what weight was given by the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system selection team to stackability of flatracks; and if he will make a statement; (2) to what extent the question of stacking was a criterion in the selection of demountable rack off-loading pick-up system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: Flatrack stacking was addressed in the statement of requirements and was thus an element fully considered in the assessment along with the many other factors.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment was made by the 1982 demountable rack off-loading pick-up system selection team of the implications of the stacking of loaded flatracks for the size of field storage areas; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment was made by his Department in 1980 of the implications of the stacking of loaded flatracks for the space required in storage areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: None.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of Boughton's shortcomings in its presentation for the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system contract; and if he will make37a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: No.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if those companies involved in 1982 provided drawings of their proposed load handling systems drawn onto the prime contractor's chassis under consideration for the demountable rack off-loading pick-up system; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what was the nature of such drawings as Multilift produced via the main contractors in 1982 in connection with the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December c. *504*]: All companies' submissions for the 1982 DROPS competition provided adequate drawings or other supporting detail covering the widest field of vehicle-load handling system combinations.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations were received from any demountable rack off-loading pick-up system prime contractors in 1982 on Multilift's presentation and management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: Multilift load-handling systems featured prominently in a number of main contractor submissions including those of the main contractors finally selected. I cannot, of course, discuss details of particular tender or contract submissions.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what allocations were introduced into the equipment produced for trials in 1984 after its feasibility study response in 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The equipment furnished for the Department's DROPS traps in 1984 was based upon proposals of the selected competing main contractors. The final specification took up certain options offered and other changes ordered by the Department affecting engine power (340 bhp), adoption of automatic transmission and hydraulic power take-off. "Live" power take-off was the only feature not offered by companies other than Boughton's. Its specification had no significant cost implications.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the weight *(a)* originally estimated by Multilift for its Mk II flat flatrack system and *(b)* of the equipment built; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The difference was 7·5 per cent.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision was taken by his Department that the requirement for low mobility demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system was to be provided by the use of a trailer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The use of a trailer in this role was envisaged in the DROPS requirement first formally approved in 1982.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the main conclusions of the project carried out by his Department into how the low mobility transport role after the introduction of demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system would be carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: I am not clear to which project my right hon. Friend is referring.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what degree of detail the selected main contractors and subcontractors proposed designs and analysis of a trailer for demountable rack off-load and pick-up system LMLC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The selected main contractors' proposals fully met the Department's essential assessment needs in these regards.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if Boughton's put forward detailed proposals for, and recommendations on, a trailer as the preferred solution for demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system LMLC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: Yes.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the trailers proposed by the selected main contractors and subcontractors met the stated requirement for LMLC demountable racking off-loading and pick-up system in respect of one-man operation and maximum loading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: Trailers proposed by the selected main contractors were judged adequate in both respects and for the subsequent trials.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made by his Department in reviewing the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system feasibility study in 1983 of the implications for road traffic law of trailer-truck combinations selected to fulfil the low mobility demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system role on the roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The Department's competition

assessments in 1983 took due account of proposed truck-trailer combinations in the context of the relevant construction and use regulations.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the gross weight of *(a)* Boughton 1982 proposed demountable rack off-loading and demountable system LMLC truck-trailer combination and *(b)* the combinations selected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The gross estimated weight of the selected combination is some 3,000 kg more than the weight estimated in Boughton's proposals.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proposal was made at the time of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system submissions in 1982 by the two selected contractors as to the most cost effective way of meeting the stated requirements for the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 December 1986, c. *504*]: The proposals made by the selected contractors covered a wide range of solutions and options and I regret I cannot disclose particular details of tender offers.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if those responsible for the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system selection in 1983 included any officers with previous experience of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system trials and development work carried out by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The DROPS assessment process took place under the direction of professional procurement staff responsible for the development and procurement of armed services vehicles of all types. They worked in close conjunction with the Army's logistic authorities who commissioned and directed the earlier research and concept trials which established the DROPS requirement.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the mechanical efficiency of the Boughton demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipment criticised by his Department for its higher hydraulic pressures compared with that of other systems selected in preference to it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*.]: The Department judged the Boughton system to be inferior in performance to others on a number of technical grounds, including the higher hydraulic pressures mentioned.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what factors he attributes the failure of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system procurement to meet its in-service date; what effect the non-involvement of his Department's demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system experts in the assessment of proposals had in his regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*.]: There has been no failure. DROPS will enter service in 1989. The original staff requirement of 1982 envisaged a date of late 1988 subject to the results of the considerable feasibility study and other work which still had to be undertaken.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department's team of demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system experts making the 1983 selection were aware of the conclusions of project 226 regarding the use of trailers to provide the low mobility demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system function; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*.]: Yes.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made to the equipment specifications proposed in 1982 by the successful demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system competitors; to what extent those changes introduce any features proposed and costed in Boughton's production cost estimates but not costed in the selected competitors' original estimates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*.]: The equipment furnished for the Department's DROPS trials in 1984 was based upon proposals of the selected competing main contractors. The final specification took up certain options offered and other changes ordered by the Department affecting engine power (340 bhp), adoption of automatic transmission and hydraulic power take-off. "Live" power take-off was the only feature not offered by companies other than Boughton's. Its specification had no significant cost implications.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the prices and production cost estimates put forward by Foden and by Scammell in respect of their 1982 demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipment proposals were the subject of disclaimers and caveats; if Boughton's prices or production cost estimates were accompanied by any such disclaimers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The production cost estimates and associated commercial terms of all firms in the 1982-83 DROPS competition were related to the particular equipment proposals, designs and specifications they offered. It is not the usual practice to disclose detailed tender information provided commercially in confidence.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the specifications for the MMLC demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipments proposed by *(a)* Foden and *(b)* Scammell in the 1982 demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system feasibility study response compared with those for the MMLC demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipments proposed by Boughton in respect of the engine power, transmission and all features including the number of wheels and axles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: It is not the usual practice to disclose detailed confidential tender information of this character.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the price put forward in 1982 by Scammell in respect of Boughton's demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system load handling systems compared with the price put forward by Scammell for Multilift's flat flatrack load handling system, for Multilift's A-frame flatrack load handling system and for Powell Duffryn's A-frame flatrack load handling system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: I cannot disclose details of particular tender prices.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the requirement that the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system requirement that the vehicle be able to transmit power to the wheels at the same time as operating the hydraulic load handling system a live hydraulic facility was first formally recognised by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The Department's decision to adopt live hydraulics in DROPS vehicles was taken in 1985 following its extensive field and engineering trials of this and alternative forms of power take-off.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, at the time in 1984 when he gave as a reason for the non-selection of the Boughton's demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system equipment that it lacked power to lift the load of 14 tonnes required by the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system statement of requirement, he was aware of the United States army trial reports stating that the Boughton equipment had regularly picked up 16·5 tonnes without difficulty in the worst of conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The Department's decisions not to select Boughton came from its assessment of the particular equipment proposals which the firm submitted in the competition in 1982. These assessments were the subject of the then Secretary of State's correspondence with my right hon. Friend in February 1984. They could thus take no account of United States Army trials of other equipment which took place only subsequent to the British Army competition and whose reports were available only later in 1984.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was his Department's assessment, after Boughton proposed the inclusion of live hydraulics in its 1982 demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system submission, of the role of live hydraulics as a deciding factor in the ability of the demountable rack off-loading system to pick up loads sunk in mud; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: Based upon its consideration of all the proposals and solutions offered by industry as well as its own experience the Department's assessment in 1983 was that its trials should cover live hydraulics and alternative forms of power take-off across the full spectrum of operating conditions.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department has told Boughton about the implications of live hydraulics for the cost of demountable rack off-loading and pick-up systems; whether the prices and production cost estimates of any competitive equipments proposed in 1982 without live hydraulics were adjusted for this and other increases in the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system specification before the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system selection team compared these prices and prodution cost estimates without Boughton's submission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The tender assessment process in 1982-83 took full account of all relevant considerations including differences in detailed specifications and prices offered by all the competing firms. I am not aware of any particular information passed to Messrs. Boughton on live hydraulic costs or other implications.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what criticisms his Department made of Boughton's proposed demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system regarding the hydraulic pressure at which it worked; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: Higher hydraulic pressures are generally considered less desirable on grounds of maintainability, reliability and, in certain instances, safety.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the 1982 statement of requirements for the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system any requirement was stated indicating either a maximum acceptable hydraulic pressure or a preference for low hydraulic pressures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: No. These are matters of normal professional engineering judgment.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied that his Department's demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system team of experts in 1983 understood the nature of all the offers submitted to it, that it was able to reconcile their drawings, their performance calculations and their written statements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: Yes.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what engine power was called for in the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system 1982 statement of requirement; whether Boughtons met that requirement in respect of both its IMMLC and MMLC proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The original DROPS requirement statement to industry called for minimum engine powers of 10 bhp per tonne and 12 bhp per tonne for the medium and improved mobility vehicles respectively. The Boughton proposals considerably exceeded the requirement in both instances.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the equipment *(a)* as proposed in 1982 and *(b)* as built in 1984 by Fodens and Scammells met the stated

minimum power requirements for demountable rack off-loading pick-up system IMMLC and MMLC vehicles contained in the 1982 stated requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: Both Foden's and Scammell's proposals and equipment fully met the indicated power requirements in the medium mobility range. In the improved medium range the power requirements were fully satisfied by Scammell: Fodens were slightly below.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what figure has been determined as the minimum power-to-weight requirements for the low mobility trailer combination of demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system to comply with United Kingdom or Federal German legislation or Army mobility requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: No particular figure has been determined: however the Army's DROPS equipment fully meets the requirements of United Kingdom legislation in these regards.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence when Boughton first proposed that the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system vehicle should have live hydraulics; what proposals were made regarding this facility by Fodens, Scammell Multilift in their 1982 demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system submissions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The Boughton 1982 proposals employed live hydraulics: those of other firms provided for alternative solutions.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has that British military technology related to the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system project is being passed to the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: None.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has that the parent company of Multilift, recently awarded the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system contract, Partek of Finland has engaged in work for the military forces of the Soviet Union or any of its Warsaw pact allies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: None. I understand that, as a matter of policy, Partek does not engage in such work.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has that the parent company of Multilift, recently awarded the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system contract, Partek of Finland has any connection with the Russian civilian truck industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: I have no knowledge of any such connection, although I understand that Partek has provided some commercial hydraulic equipment for waste disposal.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of the production order for the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: The DROPS production orders so far announced are worth some £220 million.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many firms were shortlisted for competitive trialling of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: Initially 11 firms provided main contractor proposals involving over 20 firms as main or subcontractors. Five firms were shortlisted for full main contractor assessment. Two main contractors (Foden Trucks and Scammell Motors) were finally selected to provide main equipments for the subsequent competitive trials, together with Multilift (two systems) and Powell Duffryn (load-handling systems), Marshalls of Cambridge and Multilift (flatracks), and Craven Tasker and Scottorn (trailers).

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department retains any copyright to the Miltilift mark IV demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: The Multilift mark IV system is in essence proprietary. The Department's rights are limited to minor modifications to secure interoperability.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will describe the export licensing controls to which the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system contract awarded to Multilift, Shrewsbury will be subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: Like any other licensable equipment DROPS will require an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985 before it is exported. There would be full consideration of all relevant factors before an export licence was granted.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the Comptroller and Auditor General has informed him when he expects to complete his investigation into the awarding of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: No. The Comptroller and Auditor General's current study of the DROPS project is part of his regular review of the Department's procurement.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department defines a defence product for the purposes of export control and security classification; and if the Multilift mark IV demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system falls within that definition.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985 sets out, often in detailed terms, the specification of those goods and materials which require an export licence before they can be exported from this country. The Multilift mark IV DROPS system, although unclassified, requires, under the definitions contained in the order, an export licence.

Sir Ian Gilmour asked the Secretary of State for Defence what specifications formed the basis of the production cost estimates of the successful demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system contenders in 1983 in comparison with those which were the subject of Boughton's production cost estimates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *780*]: The production cost estimates and associated commercial terms of all firms in the 1982-83 DROPS competition were related to the particular equipment proposals, designs and specifications they offered. It is not the usual practice to disclose detailed tender information provided commercially in confidence.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he plans to take to ensure that the technology of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system contract is safeguarded for use by the United Kingdom and her allies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: DROPS technology is wholly conventional in nature and is readily available in many forms throughout the commercial vehicle and load handling system industries. Proprietary rights are safeguarded by their owners within the prevailing legal framework for intellectual property rights. DROPS equipment is subject to export licensing control in the usual way.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence when invitations were first issued for proposals to supply a combined vehicle and load handling system (DROPS).

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. 782]: August 1982.

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the company, Hearncrest Boughton in connection with allegations concerning intellectual property of the demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system project.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *782*]: Hearncrest Boughton has made a number of representations to the Ministry. In October 1985 the company claimed that 17 ideas which it believed to be original to Boughton had been incorporated in the DROPS concept of the trials equipment. To assist in formulating its claims the company was subsequently given special facilities to inspect this equipment but, in March 1986, following a careful examination by the Ministry's own intellectual property experts, Boughton was advised that, on the basis of the information that had been provided by the company, the Ministry did not believe that any unauthorised use would be made of any Boughton original ideas in the DROPS procurement. The reasons for the Ministry's views were fully explained in the correspondence with the chairman of the company, but the company was, nevertheless, given the opportunity to offer additional evidence in support of its claim if it so wished.

The company has not so far offered any such additional evidence, although it has been agreed that further discussions between relevant experts will take place as soon as the company is in a position to proceed.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 January 1987

WALES

Health Education

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether, in the light of the statement, *Official Report*, 21 November 1986, column 805, by the Secretary of State for Social Services, that the Health Education Council was to be reconstituted as a special health authority, he will make a statement on the future of health education in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Yes. I have decided that the health educational interests of Wales will be best served by a separate special health authority. The new body will take over the role in Wales of the Health Education Council, will carry on the work of the Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales and will assume responsibility for Heartbeat Wales. I envisage that Wales will benefit from the promotional aspects of the national AIDS campaign to be undertaken by the English authority, but that the Welsh AIDS campaign will continue its work in Wales under the aegis of the Welsh authority.

The new body should give a renewed impetus to health education in Wales and will further the very important work already carried out by the Health Education Council and the Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales. It will be in an advantageous position to bring together the activities of the various statutory and voluntary bodies in the Principality who have an interest in health education.

Much work needs to be done to bring the authority into being quickly and I shall make a further statement when decisions have been made on membership, staffing and resources.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will allow the Wales Tourist Board to promote Wales overseas and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to introduce legislation to change the existing arrangements whereby the promotion of Wales overseas is handled primarily by the British Tourist Authority. However, as I explained to the Welsh Affairs Committee when I appeared before it on 27 November 1985, should we find that the interests of Wales are not being best served by these arrangements we would be prepared to consider alternative proposals.

Link Project

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to promote the Government's link project in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: General publicity material on the link research initiative has been prepared and, as a first step in promoting the range of programmes covered, was circulated to academic institutions in Wales in December. Information is now about to be distributed to all relevant companies, and other organisations. Other opportunities for publicity will be used as they arise and the need for future promotion will be considered in the light of responses.

Milk Quota

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will introduce legislation to allow his Department to purchase milk quota which comes on the market for redistribution to other producers in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Housing Renovation Grants

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many outstanding claims for housing renovation grants each of the district councils in Wales have; and what is the projected cost of such outstanding claims.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information is shown in the table, as at 30 September 1986.

Local Authority	*Claims Outstanding*	*Projected Costs (£000s)*
Aberconwy	92	322
Alyn and Deeside	400	1,400
Arfon	349	1,222
Blaenau Gwent	7,522	26,327
Brecknock	810	2,835
Cardiff	7,218	25,263
Carmarthen	575	2,013
Ceredigion	1,163	4,071
Colwyn	121	424
Cynon Valley	2,789	9,762
Delyn	149	522
Dinefwr	559	1,957
Dywfor	461	1,614
Glyndwr	495	1,733
Islwyn	1,058	3,703
Llanelli	348	1,218
Lliw Valley	318	1,113
Meirionnydd	9	32
Merthyr Tydfil	1,827	6,395
Monmouth	116	406
Montgomeryshire	731	2,559
Neath	1,046	3,661
Newport	2,684	9,394
Ogwr	1,176	4,116
Port Talbot (Afan)	939	3,287
Preseli	1,173	4,106
Radnor	529	1,852
Rhondda	8,280	28,980
Rhuddlan	62	217
Rhymney Valley	3,753	13,136
South Pembrokeshire	355	1,243
Swansea	1,356	4,746
Taff-Ely	1,800	6,300
Torfaen	2,426	8,491
Vale of Glamorgan	1,211	4,239
Wrexham Maelor	360	1,260
Ynys Môn	769	2,692
TOTAL	55,029	192,602

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much each of the district councils of Wales have allocated for housing renovation grants during each year since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information requested is not readily available and I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales by when he expects each of the district councils in Wales to have cleared the waiting list of claims for housing renovation grants made prior to 31 March 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robinson: It is not possible to give such an estimate, as not all authorities have taken steps to identify how many outstanding applications are still current. While many have cleared all those originating before 1984, others have substantial numbers outstanding. The distribution of housing capital allocations takes account of the problems of those authorities with the longest grant backlogs.

ENERGY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many applications for pressurised water reactor power stations he is currently considering.

Mr. Peter Walker: One: that for Sizewell B.

Power Stations (Maintenance)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, when he next meets the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, he will discuss the maintenance and refurbishment of power stations.

Mr. Peter Walker: I meet the chairman of the CEGB regularly, to discuss a wide range of matters.

Domestic Oil Prices

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will raise with the major oil companies the reasons for the increase in the price per gallon of domestic heating oil in view of the impact on rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 14 January.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe (Pensions)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Zimbabwe regarding the payment of pensions to British nationals who have returned from employment in Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Chalker: In line with the provisions of the Zimbabwe constitution, pensions continue to be remitted from Zimbabwe, generally without problem, to British nationals who have returned to the United Kingdom. In a small number of instances where individuals have experienced difficulties, our high commission in Harare has made appropriate representations to the Zimbabwe authorities.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will now ratify protocols 7 and 8 to the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom ratified protocol 8 to the European convention on human rights in April last year. The question of ratification of protocol 7 is under consideration.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide full details of the overseas aid provided to Bangladesh since 1979, and of each of the projects funded.

Mr. Chris Patten: Total British bilateral aid to Bangladesh since 1979 has been:

	(£ million)
1979	33·821
1980	[1]66·190
1981	33·383
1982	23·537
1983	24·728
1984	35·656
1985	41·173

[1] Includes £31·278 million Debt Relief

The main sectors assisted have been energy, natural resources and communications.

The major projects agreed since 1979 are as follows:

Project title	*Year first allocated*	*Amount of allocation (£ million)*
Tea Rehabilitation	1979	20·0
Dhaka Power Distribution (IA)	1982	7·8
Deep Tubewells	1983	15·0
Dhaka Power Distribution (II)	1984	13·3
Rural Development II	1984	6·7
Ashuganj Power Generation	1984	9·5
Gas Development II	1986	25·0
Bridges and Institutional Development	1986	10·3
Population and Family Health	1986	8·0

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Link Project

Mr. D.E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what part he expects the University of Wales and other research establishments in Wales to take in the new link project.

Mr. Butcher: The aim of Link is to accelerate the development of new products and services from scientific and technological research throughout the whole of the United Kingdom. Through Link, the Government will support up to half the costs of collaborative research programmes between the scientific community, and industry and commerce. All United Kingdom institutes of higher education, research establishments and industries are eligible to participate, including those in Wales. The basis for participation would be collaboration in a joint research project involving at least one research establishment and one industrial or commercial partner.

A large number of enquiries concerning Link have already been received by the Link secretariat. Several of these have originated from Welsh organisations. Firm proposals will be expected to go through normal departmental channels as they come forward.

Assisted Areas (Review)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his time schedule for reviewing the assisted areas of England and Wales; and when he will publish his decisions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Regional Aid

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish a table showing at 1986 prices the value of regional aid grants paid to each region, Scotland and Wales from 1978-79 onwards;

(2) if he will publish a table showing at 1986 prices the value of regional selective aid paid to each region, Scotland and Wales since 1978-79 onwards.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Lloyd's (Report)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how soon after receiving the report by Sir Patrick Neill and his inquiry team into the affairs of Lloyd's he proposes to publish the report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 January 1987.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the report of the inspectors appointed to investigate alleged insider dealing in his Department, the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a reliable estimate. The investigation is still in progress.

Companies Acts Investigations

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* investigations under the Companies Act initiated in the past 10 years stating *(a)* the date when inspectors were appointed, *(b)* the date of any interim report and *(c)* the date of their final report, if received, to date.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987]: The following table lists Companies Acts investigations announced since 1 January 1977:

	Date of Appointment	*Date of Report*	
		Interim	*Final*
AEG-Telefunken (UK) Ltd	4 March 1977	—	October 1978
Credit Collections Ltd	4 March 1977	—	October 1978
Norwest Holst Ltd	11 March 1977	—	20 October 1980
Gilgate Holdings Ltd	19 April 1977	2 July 1979	8 April 1981
Raybourne Group Ltd	19 April 1977	2 July 1979	8 April 1981
Parsons Sherwin and Company Ltd	21 April 1977	—	3 July 1980
Aveley Laboratories Ltd	26 April 1977	—	5 February 1981
Peachey Property Corporation Ltd	29 April 1977	—	11 December 1978
Peek Foods Ltd	9 May 1977	—	16 September 1981
Orbit Holdings Ltd	12 May 1977	—	15 September 1981
Ozalid Group Holdings Ltd	17 May 1977	—	27 November 1979
United Industrial Company Ltd	23 August 1977	—	10 December 1980
Fourth City and Commercial Investment Trust Ltd	7 February 1978	—	30 September 1981
Excelads Ltd	7 February 1978	—	30 September 1981
Systematic Tooling Ltd	7 February 1978	—	30 September 1981
H and C Davis Company Ltd	8 February 1978	19 October 1978	23 December 1980
Cambranain Ltd	14 February 1978	—	30 September 1981
Calomefern Ltd	11 April 1978	2 July 1979	8 April 1981
Desadean Properties Ltd	11 April 1978	2 July 1979	8 April 1981
Derritron Ltd	11 July 1978	23 December 1981	—
Allied Suppliers (Ireland) Ltd	10 August 1978	—	29 April 1983
St. Piran Ltd	18 December 1979	30 September 1980	31 March 1981
Consolidated Goldfields Ltd	12 February 1980	—	24 July 1980
Dunlop Holdings Ltd	25 July 1980	18 December 1980 10 March 1981	12 November 1981
Euroseas Securities Ltd	4 September 1980	—	5 March 1985
Corporate Management Planning Ltd	11 November 1981	—	24 September 1986
Euroflame Holdings plc	8 March 1982	—	—
Alexander Howden Group plc	24 September 1982	30 December 1985	—
Minet Holdings plc	8 November 1982	7 April 1986	—
WMD Underwriting Agencies Ltd	8 November 1982	7 April 1986	—
Signal Life Assurance Co Ltd	19 November 1982	—	—
British Anzani plc	11 March 1983	—	28 November 1986
Graylaw Holdings Ltd	11 March 1983	—	—
Link Service Stations Ltd	11 March 1983	—	—
The Greenbank Trust plc	6 April 1983	—	28 June 1985
Westminster Property Group plc	7 June 1983	28 March 1985	17 October 1985
House of Fraser	23 August 1983	21 July 1984	—
Bank Street Securities Ltd	4 October 1983	—	—
Pennine Commercial Holdings plc	4 October 1983	—	—

	Date of Appointment	Date of Report	
		Interim	Final
Estra, plc	3 September 1984	—	—
Hartley Baird plc	9 May 1985	—	23 May 1986
Milbury plc	27 August 1985	—	—
Aldershot Football Club Ltd	27 September 1985	—	—
Westminster Property Group Ltd	26 November 1985	—	—
Sumrie Clothes plc	7 February 1986	—	—
Guinness plc	28 November 1986	—	—
Consolidated Goldfields plc	10 December 1986	—	—

TRANSPORT

Thames Crossing, Dartford

Mr. Anfess asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make further information about the proposed new crossing of the Thames at Dartford available to local residents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A leaflet about the proposed scheme is being distributed this week in the Dartford and Thurrock areas giving details of public exhibitions about this scheme. These will be held in the Orchard Theatre in Dartford on 21 and 22 January and in the Cowdray Hall, West Thurrock on 28 and 29 January. Plans of the proposed new bridge and associated widening of the A282 approach roads will be on display. Staff from the Department of Transport and Dartford River Crossing Ltd. will be present to answer questions. I have arranged for copies of the leaflet to be placed in the Library.

Weighbridges

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if there are plans to site another weighbridge, other than that at Portsmouth ferry port, elsewhere in Portsmouth.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. The existing weighbridge is to be re-sited in a more convenient position.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those lorry weighbridges in the south-east Hampshire area which are self-weigh facilities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None of the weighbridges in the area has self-weigh facilities at present.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, following its proposed resiting to the customs area, the weighbridge at Portsmouth ferry port will be available for use by all road hauliers in the area.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If the Portsmouth Port Authority is prepared to allow road hauliers' vehicles into the ferry port, drivers will be able to take advantage of the self-weigh facility which will be provided when the weighbridge is re-sited.

Railway Lines and Stations (Reinstatement)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the lines and stations reinstated by British Rail under the Transport Act 1962 (Amendment) Act 1981 together with those which it is proposed to reinstate in the next 12 months.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand from the British Railways Board that 32 stations and two passenger services have been opened or reopened on an experimental basis under the 1981 Act. A further 11 stations and five passenger services are expected to be opened or reopened in the next 12 months.

British Registered Vessels (Safety Standards)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing legislation for ensuring that vessels registered in British territories adopt internationally accepted safety standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Present United Kingdom legislation contains no provision to control the standards adopted by the marine administrations in the British Dependent Territories. For this reason a number of international conventions do not apply to ships registered in some of the dependent territories. The Government recognise that this is not a satisfactoy situation and propose to introduce legislation when the parliamentary time allows to remedy this defect in the law by seeking powers to control the type of ship which can be registered in different territories. In the meantime the Government will continue to provide advice and assistance to marine administrations in dependent territories so that safety standards can be improved and more international conventions extended to them where appropriate.

Roadbuilding Materials

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he takes to monitor the performance of materials used in the construction of motorways and trunk roads to ensure specifications are producing the required result.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department's engineers are closely involved with the construction and maintenance of motorways and trunk roads and monitor the performance of in-service roads. When a problem with a material is encountered on any site, the performance of that material on other sites is investigated and corrective action taken if required; consideration is also given to the need to revise any standards or specifications.

Inland Waterways (Carriage of Fuel)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to altering regulations about the carriage of fuel in respect of carriage on inland waterways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None, but if the hon. Member has a particular problem in mind, he may care to write to me.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Warnock Report (Consultation Document)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of production and circulation of the recent consultation document produced by his Department on the issues raised by the Warnock report; how many copies have so far been printed; and what is the total anticipated print run.

Mr. Brooke: The printing and distribution costs were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, with recovery in the usual way from the proceeds of sales. There are some 1,100 copies still in stock out of the total print run of 5,500.

International Banking Supervision

Mr. McCrindle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has in the light of the Anglo-American pact on banking supervision, about the likelihood of other major banking countries adopting similar requirements with a view to the creation of a system of global banking supervision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The United Kingdom-United States supervisory agreement is an important advance towards establishing common international standards of capital adequacy.

The joint announcement by the Bank of England and the United States Federal banking supervision authorities on 8 January invited comment on a proposed common risk asset ratio (a measure of capital strength relative to the size and risk of a bank's business). The proposed measure incorporates off-balance sheet risks. I am placing a copy of the consultative paper in the Library of the House.

The supervisory agreement has drawn on work done in continuing supervisory discussions in Basle and Brussels, and most recently at the international supervisory conference in Amsterdam. The Bank of England and the United States authorities are discussing their proposals with supervisors in other major banking countries, notably in Europe and Japan, as well as with United Kingdom and United States banks. The Government believe that the United Kingdom-United States agreement will encourage further international co-operation in banking supervision. I understand, however, that it is too early to say what the next steps may be.

DEFENCE

United States Nuclear-powered Warships

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States nuclear-powered warships have docked in Portsmouth in the last three years.

Mr. Stanley: Nineteen.

Sports Facilities (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the costs of the building works for the new swimming pool in Portsmouth for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Freeman: The new swimming pool for the Royal Navy at Portsmouth is being provided at a cost of £450,000.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the sport facilities in his Department's ownership are available for community use in Portsmouth.

Mr. Freeman: There is extensive community use of Ministry of Defence indoor and outdoor sports facilities in Portsmouth.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the future of the swimming baths at Pitt Street, Portsmouth, which are owned by the Royal Navy.

Mr. Freeman: Consideration is being given to the future of the swimming baths at Pitt Street, Portsmouth when the new swimming pool in HMS Temeraire comes into use.

Procurement Policy

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arrangements exist to determine the operational requirements of major equipment to be procured for Her Majesty's forces; what person or committee is authorised to determine operational requirements at each stage *(a)* in concept formulation and in definition of staff target, *(b)* in feasibility study and in definition of staff requirement, *(c)* in project definition, if appropriate, and *(d)* in full development; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what arrangements existed to determine the operational requirements of major equipment to be procured for Her Majesty's forces at the times relevant to determining actions of the operational requirements for demountable rack off-loading pick-up systems; whether these arrangements have since been changed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list the dates on which a staff target for demountable rack off-loading pick-up system equipment was either stated or updated; what person or committee was authorised to determine the operational requirements contained in each such staff target, and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will list the dates on which a staff requirement for demountable rack off-loading pick-up systems equipment was either stated or updated; what person or committee was authorised to determine the operational requirements contained in each such staff requirement; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he has received any guarantees regarding application of the United States of America Export Administration Act to off set orders in connection with the Boeing air warning aircraft system contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: An operational requirement for a substantial piece of equipment for the armed forces is expressed as a staff target and subsequently as a staff requirement. Responsibility for formulating operational requirements and sponsoring STs and SRs rests with the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Systems). STs and SRs involving expenditure above a certain level require endorsement by the equipment policy committee of the Ministry of Defence, whose chairman is the Chief Scientific Adviser. These arrangements have been in force since 2 January 1985 when the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence took effect. Prior to that date formulation of STs and SRs was the responsibility of the service staffs concerned, and endorsement was required from the operational require-

ments committee (ORC), whose chairman was the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Operational Requirements), and subsequently the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff.

A ST for a demountable rack off-loading and pick-up system (DROPS) was endorsed by the ORC on 24 August 1982. A SR for DROPS was approved by the EPC on 4 July 1985. A first revise of the SR was approved by the EPC on 6 November 1986.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number and percentage of families living in their own homes *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* now;

(2) what information he has concerning the size and quality of the housing stock in England *(a)* now and *(b)* in 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: It is estimated that there were about 18·8 million dwellings in England at the end of September 1986, of which 12·2 million (65 per cent.) were owner-occupied. The corresponding figures for the end of March 1979 were 17·6 million dwellings, of which 10·0 million (57 per cent.) were in owner-occupation.

Reliable information on the quality of the country's housing stock is available only from the quinquennial English "House Condition Surveys": copies of the 1981 report, which also contains results for 1971 and 1976, are available in the Library. Results of the 1986 survey are not yet available.

Since the Government came into office in 1979, the English housing stock has increased by 1·2 million, while owner-occupation has grown by 2·2 million, an unprecedented rate of increase reflecting the success of the right-to-buy scheme. Private spending on maintaining and improving housing has been assisted by the payment of nearly 1·1 million renovation grants, and there have been 600,000 renovations of local authority and new town dwellings.

Housebuilding

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is in a position to estimate the number of new housing starts in 1986.

Mr. Tracey: It is not the practice for the Department to make forecasts of housebuilding starts. Provisional figures for the first 11 months of 1986 were published on 7 January in the Department's press release No. 6, a copy of which is available in the Library. Figures for the whole of 1986 will be released on 5 February.

Construction Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the total financial contribution of the construction industry to the United Kingdom economy in each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The net output or value added of the construction industry, (as defined by the Standard Industrial Classification which excludes manufacturing) expressed as a proportion of the United Kingdom gross domestic product for the years 1979 to 1985 is shown in the following table.

Year	Percentage GDP
1979	6·3
1980	6·2
1981	6·0
1982	5·9
1983	6·0
1984	6·2
1985	6·1

Further details can be obtained from table 2.1 of "The CSO Blue Book, United Kingdom National Accounts", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Anti-pollution control

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what study he is making of cyanuric acid techniques, developed at the United States Department of Energy's Lawrence Livermore laboratory, as a means of anti-pollution control; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department is following the progress of the experimental work at the Sandia national laboratories in California on the use of cyanuric acid to reduce nitrogen oxides in exhaust gases. First laboratory tests have been promising, but the feasibility of applying the method to practical combustion systems has yet to be demonstrated.

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has allowed any local authority, on application, a relaxation of the right to spend limits on the use of capital receipts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has no powers to do so.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any local authorities have used all of their capital receipts received from the sale of a particular asset to pay off immediately the debt charges on that particular asset.

Mr. Chope: Information on this is not collected centrally.

Agricultural Buildings (Planning Controls)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to seek to relax planning controls to allow the re-development of agricultural buildings for use as small industrial units and or housing in green belt areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) set out the Government's policy on the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings in the green belt in answer to a question by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 30 April 1986, at column 414. He said that redundant agricultural buildings can provide very suitable accommodation for small firms and tourist activities, or can be used as individual residences, without detriment to the green belt and to the benefit of the local community, especially where the buildings are of attractive appearance and can be expected with normal repair and maintenance to last for many years. There are no plans to adjust the policy further.

Homelessness

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to combat the rise in homelessness and bad housing conditions; and if he will make a statement on the recent launch of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless 1987.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Action on these matters is primarily for local authorities.

We are constantly looking at ways of preventing and relieving homelessness. Recent measures include the extra money being put in through housing associations (the Housing Corporation has received an extra £20 million in 1987-88, expected to attract a further £40-45 million private capital) and through our estate action initiative (£1·26 million already allocated this year, with more schemes in the pipeline, specifically for homelessness initiatives on housing estates). Many of the authorities approached are now responding positively to the latter despite a disappointing response from some London boroughs. However, some are still not doing so. Further information was given in my hon. Friend's reply to two debates on 19 December, at columns 1497-1501 and 1536-38.

We have increased the resources available to authorities for investment in housing in 1987-88 by 15 per cent. over 1986-87 plans. And we expect authorities to give the highest priority to renovation of their own stock, too much of which is still lying empty (113,300 dwellings at 1 April 1986). Authorities have a wide range of powers for dealing with poor housing conditions in the private sector both by renovation and by clearance. They will spend more than £500 million on these activities in the private sector this year.

On the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 9 December to the hon. Members for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) and Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on alleviating homelessness in the light of Professor John Grieve's recent report on homelessness in Greater London, a copy of which has been sent to him; and what is his estimate of the comparative public sector costs of housing homeless families in London by (i) providing them with newly built council dwellings, (ii) providing them with dwellings acquired from the private sector and improved for letting and (iii) providing them with bed and breakfast accommodation.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987]: Prevention of homelessness is a major concern. The reasons why people become homeless vary greatly: for example, changes in family structure, children leaving home earlier, marital disputes and increasing divorce rates. But better understanding of and early advice with family and financial problems can help positively. We also need to make much better use of the housing available. Far too many homes stand empty today in both the public and the private sector.

Once families are accepted as homeless, we advise local authorities to find them permanent accommodation as soon as possible. Sometimes this will be a council house or flat which, if newly built or acquired in Greater London, cost authorities around £7,000 and £5,500 respectively in the first year. This comprises interest on capital, management and maintenance. Sometimes the family will find accommodation in housing association property or elsewhere in the private sector either as tenants or as home owners.

It can be difficult to arrange accommodation at short notice where required by the homelessness legislation without using some form of temporary accommodation, especially where further inquiries are being made and a family has not yet been accepted as homeless. Some London authorities are having to make use of bed-and-breakfast hotels which cost an average of some £30 per household day. Purpose-built or adapted hostels or short life property can provide a much cheaper and a better alternative. We have made it clear to authorities that we are prepared to approve suitable proposals to acquire properties for use as hostels and, though some of the authorities approached are still refusing to bid for these resources, we have launched our estate action initiative to bring empty council dwellings into use for the homeless. The Government are funding a new Housing Corporation programme next year specifically designed to provide better interim accommodation for homeless families. The money for this programme will come from an extra £20 million for the Housing Corporation, which will be complemented by £40 to £45 million of private capital. We have also taken measures recently to stimulate the private rented sector to provide more accommodation and fill empty flats and houses, including an extension of the assured tenancy scheme.

EMPLOYMENT

European Community Social Fund

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Paymaster General what are the conditions for the expenditure of European Community social fund moneys through Manpower Services Commission programmes; and whether there is a guideline from the Directorate General V of the EEC Commission that such funding should be for "bottom up" or local initiatives rather than "top down" initiatives from Government.

Mr. Lee: Manpower Services Commission employment and training programmes which fall within the rules and guidelines of the European social fund are eligible for support from the fund on the same basis as are other applications to it. There is no guideline in the social fund regulations which stipulates that grants for such programmes should be for local initiatives.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Paymaster General on what basis the decision was taken to introduce the criteria of positive progression into Manpower Services Commission-funded programmes; and whether the introduction of such criteria was agreed by the Commission of the European Communities for Manpower Services Commission projects funded through the Community's social fund.

Mr. Lee: Unfortunately the criteria to which the hon. Member is referring are not readily identifiable from the terms of his question. If he would like to write to me setting out his concerns, I shall of course seek to provide a full reply.

Labour Statistics

Mr. John Fraser asked the Paymaster General if he will provide the numbers employed within the London docklands, together with an analysis of the nature of the occupations currently followed there.

Mr. Lee: Employment statistics for local areas are obtained from the census of employment and the most recent are for September 1981. Local estimates for the September 1984 census are not yet ready. An analysis by occupation is not available but, at September 1981, there were 25,000 employees employed in the area. The figures relates to the area covered by the wards of Custom House and Silvertown, Dockyard, Riverside, Blackwall and Millwall which corresponds most closely to the London docklands.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Paymaster General what is the number of people living in the Greater London area who have never worked since leaving school.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 11 December 1986 there were 36,947 unemployed claimants in Greater London of all ages who had not had a job since leaving full-time education, and of these, 7,115 were aged under 18 years.

Mr. Onslow asked the Paymaster General what is the latest information available to him about the proportion of all those in employment who have two or more jobs; and how this compares with the corresponding figures for each of the five previous years for which the information is available.

Mr. Lee: The latest available estimate of the proportion of persons in employment with a second job comes from the 1985 "Labour Force Survey".

Comparisons with available estimates from previous "Labour Force Surveys" are presented in the following table:

Proportion of persons in employment[1] having a second job
Great Britain

Year	*Percentage*
1979	1·6
1981	2·1
1983	2·4
1984	3·0
1985	3·3

[1]Estimates relate to the spring of each year. The data for 1983, 1984 and 1985 include persons in Government schemes, whereas 1979 and 1981 only include those on schemes who reported themselves as in employment.

Health and Safety

Sir Bernard Braine asked the Paymaster General (1) what was the last date when discussions about the control of Industrial Major Accidents Hazards Regulations were held with the management of each of the installations which were the subject of investigations into Canvey Island safety in 1978 and subsequently; and what improvements have been made;

(2) if he will list the total amount of hazardous substances currently stored at the high risk installations which were the subject of Health and Safety Executive investigations in 1978 and subsequently;

(3) if he will indicate when the last survey was taken of safety standards at the industrial installations which were the subject of the Canvey Island first, second and third reports and of public inquiries held since 1978; what are the findings; and whether any additional steps have been taken in regard to the safety of these installations.

Mr. Trippier: I shall write shortly to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the House Library.

Isle of Grain (Oil Refinery)

Sir Bernard Braine asked the Paymaster General whether the Health and Safety Executive has been informed of the plans of British Gas to develop a former oil refinery site on the Isle of Grain in conjuction with its existing storage facility there, including any linkage with the Canvey methane terminal on Canvey Island; and what are the implications for the Island's safety from any such linkage.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. In early 1984 the Health and Safety Executive was informed by British Gas of its plan to develop the former Kent oil refinery site on the Isle of Grain and detailed discussions on the proposal have taken place since then and are continuing. The Health and Safety Executive is not aware of any proposed link between the Isle of Grain site and the Canvey methane terminal.

MSC Schemes

Mr. Hancock asked the Paymaster General what information he has as to the proportion of those unemployed, who have completed a Manpower Services Commission scheme, and who were unemployed prior to joining the scheme.

Mr. Lee: No reliable information is available on past participation on Manpower Services Commission schemes by those currently unemployed.

Council of Registration of Gas Installers

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General when he expects the Health and Safety Executive to issue to the gas industry its proposals for replacing the Council of Registration of Gas Installers.

Mr. Trippier: The Health and Safety Executive hopes to discuss its proposal for a new, independent and representative body to promote gas safety with representatives of all sides of the industry within the next few weeks.

Job Training Scheme

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Paymaster General if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright), *Official Report*, 9 December, column 115, he plans to make any changes to arrangements for assessing training allowances for those taking part in the pilots of the new job training scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Changes are being introduced this month which will simplify arrangements for people going on to the scheme.

Under these revised arrangements new trainees will receive a training allowance based on their benefit entitlement and normally this will equal the amount of unemployment benefit last paid or, in the case of those receiving supplementary benefit, a fixed amount below the non-householder scale rate. This will be topped up by a

training supplement, where appropriate, to the person's level of benefit entitlement. People getting this training supplement will continue to qualify for single payments, certificated housing benefit and other passported benefits without the need for any special arrangements.

Restart Scheme

Mr. Marlow asked the Paymaster General what are the latest figures, expressed as numbers and percentages by region, for *(a)* the numbers of Restart letters sent out, *(b)* the number of second letters sent out, *(c)* the numbers who have been sent letters out but have not yet attended interviews and *(d)* the numbers who have left the register (i) without any response to the programme and (ii) subsequent to interview and counselling.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987, c. *52*]: The latest figures are for the period up to 11 December 1986. They are contained in the table. The numbers of those who have ceased to claim benefit include those who cease to do so for reasons unconnected with Restart. We do not know how many people who cease to claim benefit do so because they have found work or training or how many of those did so as a result of Restart.

MSC Regions

	South East	London	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands	Yorks and Humberside	North West	Northern	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain Total
1. Numbers of first Restart letters sent out	83,675	129,815	43,291	110,999	75,778	84,170	161,646	74,104	51,461	97,551	912,490
2. Numbers of second letters sent out	16,511	43,292	9,075	18,190	12,756	12,747	29,428	9,437	9,663	17,822	178,921
3. Second letters as percentage of first letters	20	33	21	16	17	15	18	13	19	18	20
4. Numbers of failures to attend following two invitations	4,962	15,404	2,305	3,156	3,159	3,333	7,530	2,273	2,434	4,391	48,987
5. Failures to attend as percentage of first letters	6	12	5	3	4	4	5	3	5	5	5
6. Numbers ceasing to claim benefit being contacted but before interview and counselling	9,335	10,315	4,184	6,179	7,595	7,442	13,148	4,694	4,667	6,843	74,402
7. Numbers ceasing to claim benefit after being contacted but before interview and counselling as percentage of first letters sent out	11	8	10	6	10	9	8	6	9	7	8
8. Numbers ceasing to claim benefit after interview and counselling	6,943	7,453	3,698	5,736	5,860	7,592	12,902	8,103	5,657	8,293	72,239
9. Numbers ceasing to claim benefit after interview and counselling as percentage of first letters sent out	8	6	9	5	8	9	8	11	11	9	8

HOME DEPARTMENT

Welsh Police Officers (Training Courses)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of Welsh police officers serving in Welsh police forces who have been successful since 1971 in gaining a place on the senior command course at the police college, Bramshill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since 1971, five police officers from police forces in Wales have been selected for the senior command course at the Police Staff College, including two for the course in 1987. Of these, three officers were born in Wales.

Racial Attacks

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of reported racial attacks in each of the London boroughs during each of the last three years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 4 December 1986, at columns 711-14.

Independent Broadcasting Association Board

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will appoint new members of the Independent Broadcasting Association Board to replace those who have retired.

Mr. Mellor: As soon as possible.

Warning and Monitoring Organisation

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has yet finalised the dates of the United Kingdom's warning and monitoring organisation (UKWMO) exercises for the current year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 1987 exercise dates for the United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation are: 4-5 April, 21 June, 11 October and 1 November.

Animal Procedures Committee

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of persons appointed to the Animal Procedures Committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Animal Procedures Committee will be appointed shortly and the membership of the committee will be made public.

Manchester (Deputy Chief Constable)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester upon the restrictions placed upon the deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester by the clerk for the Manchester Police Authority on his giving evidence in forthcoming proceedings concerning the chief constable of Greater Manchester and two other senior police officers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Welsh-English Bilingual Penalty Tickets

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to police

forces in Wales on the production of bilingual Welsh-English fixed penalty tickets for motoring offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have not issued any formal guidance to chief constables of this question, but there was consultation between the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers before implementation of part III of the Transport Act 1982, which had regard to the practical difficulties of producing and using convenient bilingual versions of the form.

Prisoners (Blood Tests)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any prisoners on remand or sentenced are required to submit to blood tests during the course of a medical or other examination.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Prison Building Projects

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the proposed new prison projects announced since the beginning of 1984 with the original and revised financial estimates.

Mr. Mellor: The list of new prison building projects added to the programme since 1984, together with the original and latest estimates of cost, is as follows:

	Original/Estimated Cost (September 1986 Prices) £ million	*Current Estimate Cost (September 1986 Prices) £ million*
Ashford, Surrey	35	35
Doncaster, South Yorks	30	31
Rochdale, Greater Manchester	35	35
Wrexham, Clwyd	30	30
Banstead, Surrey	65	65

Detention Centres

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all detention centre establishments whose designation has changed since the beginning of 1982.

Mr. Mellor: Of those establishments which were designated, in whole or in part, as detention centres on 31 December 1981, the following have been redesignated as youth custody centres; Erlestoke; Guys March; Werrington House; and Campsfield House. Aldington and Send have been redesignated as prisons.

Women Prisoners (Babies)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* how many women were in custody with their children on the most recent convenient date, *(b)* in which prisons these women with their children were held, *(c)* what were the ages of the children and *(d)* for what offences these mothers had been imprisoned.

Mr. Mellor *[pursuant to his reply, 13 January 1987]*: On 12 January, 24 women had their babies with them in prison mother and baby units, at Askham Grange, Holloway and Styal.

The ages of the babies were:

Under one month, 7
Aged 2 months, 1
Aged 3 months, 4
Aged 5 months, 1
Aged 6 months, 2
Aged 7 months, 4
Aged 9 months, 3
Aged 11 months, 1
Aged 13 months, 1

One woman was a remand prisoner. Of the other 2 four had been convicted of drugs charges, four f deception and three for robbery. The offences of t remaining 12 were robbery and actual bodily harm trespass and theft; burglary and robbery; handling stole goods; forgery and conspiracy; forgery, fraud, deceptio and handling stolen goods; burglary and arso conspiracy to rob; attempted arson; theft; shoplifting; an actual bodily harm and blackmail.

PRIME MINISTER

Capital Spending Projects

Mr. Hancock asked the Prime Minister how much ha been spent on publicly funded capital spending projects fo each of the last three years.

The Prime Minister: Public sector capital spendin figures for the last three years are as follows:

	£ billio
1984-85 outturn	21·6
1985-86 outturn	21·5
1986-87 estimated outturn	22·5

Source: Table 1.14, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90" (Cm. 56-I).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Licensing Hours

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations he has received from residents of Northern Ireland concerning proposals to extend licensing hours; and how many of these representations have been *(a)* broadly in favour of the extension of such hours and *(b)* opposed thereto.

Mr. Needham: I have received 26,904 letters from members of the public and organisations concerning the Government's proposals to extend licensing hours in Northern Ireland. Of these, 16,461 were in favour of and 10,443 were opposed to the proposals. I have also received petitions from the Presbyterian and Free Presbyterian Churches containing 25,935 and 23,594 signatures respectively opposing the proposals.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that measures which he proposes on licensing hours in Northern Ireland should be in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, and to consult with hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I shall consider carefully the view of all those who have commented on the Government's proposals for changes in the licensing hours as they apply to licensed premises and registered clubs in decid·ng the

contents of the draft legislation which Parliament will be asked to approve later this year. I shall also take account of the representations which the Government have received since publication of the Blackburn report in 1979, as well as the findings of attitudes surveys conducted by the Government in 1978 and 1984. Additionally, I shall have regard to other important considerations, including the unsatisfactory state of the existing law, the problems of enforcement, and of course, the implications for the health of the community.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is his intention to proceed with proposals to extend licensing hours in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I am at present considering the representations received from members of the public, churches, and other organisations. I shall take all the views expressed fully into account when deciding what changes, if any, should be made to the published proposals.

Mahgaberry Prison

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the current male and female populations of Mahgaberry prison in Northern Ireland; and what is the certified normal accommodation;

(2) whether there are any plans to allocate additional prisoners to Mahgaberry prison during 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what was the cost of building and other alterations to Mahgaberry prison during 1986; and what are the estimated costs for building and other alterations in 1987.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Further Education (Disabled People)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of the students attending colleges of further education in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England and Wales are registered disabled.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not collected centrally on a routine basis. However, in 1985 a survey of students with special educational needs was carried out, covering public sector higher education and non-advanced further education in England. The survey estimated that some 18,000 of the students attending courses at colleges of further and higher education had special educational needs which required additional support or equipment. This represents about 0·9 per cent. of students in public sector further and higher education. In addition some 26,000 students from other institutions were receiving tuition from FE college staff under link or outreach arrangements.

Information for Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the size of the Medical Research Council budget for the current financial year.

Mr. Dunn: The Medical Research Council budget for 1986-87 is made up of the grant-in-aid from the science budget of £128·3 million, plus a further £8·3 million received mainly from other Government Departments, industry, international organisations, local government authorities, other research councils and charities.

Local Education Authorities (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is the Government's intention to include any new schemes in the capital allocations for buildings in the local authority sector of higher education for *(a)* 1987-88 and *(b)* 1988-89.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It was not possible to make any allocations for major new building work in local authority higher education in 1987-88. In making allocations for new capital projects by local education authorities I had to give priority to projects to provide new school places in areas of population growth and to work arising from statutory proposals to remove surplus school places. After taking account also of local education authorities' contractual commitments I had little remaining to allocate either for much needed improvement work in schools or for other capital expenditure in further and higher education. However, with the total spending power available to authorities from allocations and capital receipts and the freedom they enjoy to vire within their total of prescribed expenditure between and within services, some authorities may decide nevertheless to start work on major building schemes in their higher education institutions. It is too early at this stage to predict whether, and, if so, at what level, it will be possible to make allocations for major new building work in local authority higher education in 1988-89.

Grammar Schools

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the retention of the remaining grammar schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The draft circular "Providing for Quality", issued for consultation in August 1986, makes it clear that in exercising his statutory duty to consider on their individual merits proposals for the reorganisation of schools the holder of my office will have regard, inter alia, to parental preference for retention of grammar schools and to whether the established quality of the school was likely to be sustained. He would normally approve the closure of a school only if he were satisfied both that it was unlikely to be able to sustain its established quality and that the alternative provision would be better.

Private Schools

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the maintenance of charitable status for private schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The independent sector's contribution continues to enrich the education system and the Government are committed to preserving and fostering it. We have no plans to remove charitable status from those schools which enjoy it.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Resettlement Unit (Merseyside)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why Knowsley borough council's proposals concerning the resettlement unit at Field Lane, Fazakerley, were rejected; and what account was taken of the recommendations by the review body set up on Merseyside.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has for the resettlement unit in Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lyell: All 22 DHSS-run resettlement units, including that at Fazakerley, Liverpool are to be closed. They will be replaced by groups of smaller hostels, run by local agencies, voluntary and local authority, and funded by the Department. The proposal by the Liverpool review team that the existing unit at Fazakerley should simply be taken over by Knowsley borough council did not offer the kind of improved provision envisaged, and the review team has therefore been asked to reconsider.

AIDS

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* those institutions which are recieving funds from his Department for AIDS-related research, together with the magnitude of those funds.

Mr. Newton: Funding for AIDS research currently supported by the Department has been allocated to the following research institutions:

Location	*Estimated total cost* £
i. University College Hospital, London	39,500
ii. University College, Cardiff	136,700
iii. Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London	45,000

Additionally, the Department is contributing to:

(a) The Medical Research Council, for epidemiological studies and for the United Kingdom Centre for Co-ordinating Epidemiological Research on AIDS: up to £250,000 per annum.

(b) The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control: £60,000 in 1986-87.

(c) The Public Health Laboratory Services Board: expenditure on research including some service elements was £740,000 in 1986-87 plus a further £500,000 mainly for screening.

(d) The National Blood Transfusion Service (with the Middlesex hospital medical school): £82,000 on two research studies.

Research on AIDS in the United Kingdom is co-ordinated by the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the science budget of the Department of Education and Science. On 18 December 1986 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced the addition of £1 million a year to the council's grant for the purposes of AIDS research.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he has received as to whether heat treatment of blood and blood products, respectively, destroys HIV *(a)* before and *(b)* after it can be identified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now in a position to guarantee that *(a)* blood products, including factor 8, and *(b)* whole blood, supplied through the national blood transfusion service is totally free of the AIDS virus; if he is in a position to give a guarantee that no patient receiving such supplies will contract the AIDS virus in this way; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The safety of the blood supply in this country is maintained in two ways. First, all potential donors are given a leaflet which asks those who are at risk of AIDS not to give blood. Secondly, all blood donations are tested for evidence of infection.

These precautions reduce the chance of a unit of blood being infected and failing to be detected to about one in a million.

Whole blood or red cells cannot be heat treated when used for blood transfusions, but those blood products for which transmission of HIV has been established are given a heat treatment to inactivate the virus.

Evidence suggests that the heat treatment currently used by manufacturers of blood products made from blood plasma will inactivate any HIV present, even if HIV antibodies had not been identified in the blood donation from which it was obtained.

Sir Philip Goodhart asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of its resources to screen for AIDS students coming to the United Kingdom from Africa, America and the middle east; and what estimate he has made of the cost of providing that screening.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 December 1986, c. *122-23*]: The cost of such arrangements would vary considerably according to a number of factors, including the country in which the screening was carried out. We would not expect resources to be an inhibiting factor, should such a policy be considered appropriate.

Mr. K. T. Runfitt

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why Mr. K. T. Runfitt of flat 2, 26-28 Osborne road, Southsea, whose case is the subject of a letter from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, dated 8 November 1986, has not received replies to his four letters to his Department.

Mr. Lyell: The case to which the hon. Member refers is complex and required advice from the chief adjudication officer. The advice has now been received and the Department will be writing to Mr. Runfitt as soon as possible.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in how many areas the severe weather payments have come into effect this winter so far.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 January, at column 132.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to draw attention in the

Leeds metropolitan district council area to the availability of severe weather payments for those in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Major: Advertisements about exceptionally cold weather payments have been placed in the *Yorkshire Post* and *Yorkshire Evening Post*, which cover this area, and they will appear today. Articles about the scheme will appear in other local papers this week.

The regional information officer has been interviewed on local radio and has appeared on Yorkshire TV.

Advertisements will appear in the national press today and on commercial radio throughout the country.

Posters and leaflets have been issued to all of the Department's local offices, including the five offices serving this area.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people over retirement age received severe weather payments in the Leeds metropolitan district council area in 1984, 1985 and 1986; and what was the total cost of those payments for each year.

Mr. Major: Information on exceptionally severe weather payments is not collected by category of claimant. The total number and cost of payments made by the local offices which deal with the Leeds metropolitan district council area are as follows:

Year	*Number of payments*	*Total cost £*
1984	None	Nil
1985	4,104	50,617
1986	13,608	219,284

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the minimum night temperature, *(b)* the daily mean temperature, *(c)* the weekly mean temperature for each of the weather stations used for calculating severe weather payments for the week 5 January to 11 January inclusive.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, if he will list, for the week 5 January to 11 January, the average daily temperatures for each weather station designated for measuring temperatures for exceptionally severe weather payments; and what was the lowest recorded temperature for each station during that week.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his replies*, 13 January 1987 and 15 January 1987]: The following table gives the information on daily and weekly mean temperatures for the week 5 January 1987 to 11 January 1987 inclusive. I shall let the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) have information on minimum night temperatures very shortly.

Week 5 January to 11 January 1987

Weather station	*Daily mean temperature*							*Weekly mean temperature*
	Monday	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*	
Aberdeen AP	2·3	2·2	2·8	−1·0	−2·3	−3·4	−4·4	−0·6
Dumfries	5·6	2·9	1·3	−3·5	−3·3	−1·2	−4·9	−0·4
Edinburgh AP	3·3	2·8	−1·5	−4·0	−2·8	−2·3	−4·1	−1·2
Eskdalemuir	2·6	1·3	0·4	−5·6	−3·8	−2·2	−6·9	−2·0
Fort William	4·5	2·3	−1·8	−3·3	−1·0	−0·3	−1·3	−0·1
Glasgow AP	4·0	2·6	−1·8	−4·5	−1·8	0·6	−3·3	−0·6
Kinloss	2·6	2·5	1·8	−1·9	−3·0	−2·3	−4·0	−0·6
Kirkwall	2·9	3·1	2·6	2·6	1·4	1·9	−2·0	1·8
Lerwick	2·5	2·0	2·8	3·7	3·3	0·1	−2·6	1·6
Leuchars	2·8	3·1	0·4	−3·4	−2·3	−1·4	−2·3	−0·4
Machriphanish	5·0	4·9	0·0	1·0	1·5	2·5	−1·6	1·9
Prestwick	4·8	3·4	−1·0	−1·6	0·4	1·0	−3·9	0·6
Stornaway	3·4	3·5	3·0	2·5	3·3	0·5	−0·6	2·3
Whithorn	6·3	3·1	0·1	0·1	1·8	1·1	−2·3	1·5
Wick	2·1	2·1	1·5	−0·3	1·0	1·9	−1·0	1·1
Aberporth	6·1	5·5	2·4	0·6	2·0	2·0	−3·6	2·1
Brawdy	6·4	5·3	0·7	0·6	1·6	2·2	−3·3	1·9
Bristol	7·5	6·3	3·4	0·2	0·8	1·6	−3·5	2·3
Chivenor	7·9	6·9	1·2	0·3	1·6	2·9	−2·8	2·6
Cilfyndd	5·8	3·6	−1·0	−1·7	−1·4	0·6	−5·0	0·1
Culdrose	7·9	6·3	2·1	4·3	6·6	3·3	0·3	4·4
Exeter	7·6	5·7	0·9	0·0	1·5	1·9	−3·4	2·0
Lyneham	5·8	3·8	0·9	−1·4	−2·0	−0·3	−6·1	0·1
Mumbles	6·9	5·6	3·2	3·1	2·9	3·3	−2·3	3·3
Okehampton	5·1	3·0	−1·0	−0·8	1·7	0·4	−5·0	0·3
Rhoose	6·9	4·7	1·5	−0·3	−0·2	1·4	−4·2	1·4
St. Mawgan	7·8	6·6	1·1	2·3	5·8	3·4	−2·3	3·5
Trawsfynydd	4·6	3·9	1·0	−0·5	−0·5	0·3	−4·8	0·6
Valley	7·0	6·2	2·0	0·9	2·3	2·1	−3·1	2·5
Yeovilton	6·8	5·7	0·3	−1·6	−1·1	1·1	−4·2	1·0
Brize Norton	6·1	4·0	0·5	−1·9	−2·0	−0·3	−4·8	0·2
Boscombe Down	6·0	4·3	0·3	−1·3	−1·3	0·6	−4·9	0·5
Bournemouth AP	5·6	4·9	0·1	−0·9	−1·4	1·5	−4·0	1·0
Mount Batten	8·5	6·6	2·3	2·4	4·7	2·5	−2·0	3·6
Easthampstead	6·5	3·6	−1·1	−2·0	−4·0	0·0	−5·0	−0·3
Gatwick AP	6·6	4·4	0·6	−2·7	0·0	0·0	−5·0	0·5
Herstmonceux	6·3	3·4	1·4	−1·3	−0·1	−0·1	−5·8	0·6
Manston	5·5	4·3	2·2	0·5	−1·3	−0·4	−4·8	0·9
Southampton W.C	7·3	5·3	1·8	1·3	1·3	1·8	−3·6	2·2

Weather station	Daily mean temperature							Weekly mean temperature
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
Heathrow AP	6·8	4·6	1·5	−1·7	0·2	0·5	−4·3	1·1
Stansted	5·3	3·4	0·1	0·0	−2·7	−1·2	−5·8	−0·1
Coltishall	4·5	3·9	2·8	−0·8	−2·2	−2·9	−5·3	0·0
Marham	4·8	3·1	0·8	−1·7	−1·9	−1·6	−7·2	−0·5
Wyton	5·9	3·1	0·3	0·0	−1·5	−1·5	−6·0	0·0
Wattisham	4·5	2·5	0·0	−1·5	−2·5	−2·0	−7·0	−0·8
Honington	4·9	2·6	0·5	0·5	−1·5	−2·0	−6·7	−0·2
Bedford RAE	5·3	3·3	0·6	−0·8	−2·0	−1·5	−6·3	−0·2
Birmingham AP	6·2	3·4	0·8	−1·9	−2·0	−0·5	−5·4	0·1
Shawbury	6·1	3·8	0·1	−3·2	−2·8	0·1	−5·3	−0·2
Watnall	5·0	3·2	1·6	−0·9	−2·4	−1·3	−5·8	−0·1
Coningsby	5·1	3·4	0·8	0·4	−2·2	−0·6	−5·1	0·3
Binbrook	3·8	2·3	1·1	−0·6	−1·8	−1·2	−5·3	−0·3
Boulmer	4·1	3·4	2·5	−0·3	−1·0	−1·4	−3·6	0·5
Leeming	4·9	2·9	2·5	−1·4	−2·4	−1·4	−4·8	0·0
Leeds W.C	5·2	3·2	2·8	0·0	−1·3	−1·0	−4·8	0·6
Tynemouth	4·3	3·2	1·9	−0·3	−0·3	−0·7	−3·0	0·7
Finningley	5·0	3·6	2·0	−0·3	−2·3	−0·9	−5·0	0·4
Whitby CG	4·4	3·8	3·3	−2·4	−0·6	−2·1	−3·9	0·3
Aughton	6·2	3·6	1·1	−0·8	−0·6	0·5	−4·5	0·8
Blackpool AP	6·8	4·6	1·6	−2·5	−2·0	0·6	−4·6	0·6
Eskmeals	6·9	4·0	−0·3	0·3	−0·3	1·4	−3·6	1·2
Manchester AP	5·4	3·6	1·5	−1·0	0·3	0·5	−4·5	0·8
Carlisle	5·4	2·5	−0·5	−2·0	−1·4	−0·4	−4·8	−0·2

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of paying £5 per week extra heating allowance to all current qualifiers for heating allowance from December to March, inclusive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: About 2,830,000[1] supplementary benefit claimants were in receipt of a weekly heating addition in 1984-85, the latest year for which information is available. If a £5 per week extra heating allowance was paid for a 17 week period from December to March inclusive, the cost would be around £240 million.

[1] *Source:* "Annual Statistical Enquiry 1984".

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the severe weather payment for the week commencing Monday 12 January will be paid to the recipients.

Mr. Major: The Department's local offices have been instructed to give priority to exceptionally cold weather payments; to deal with claims for week commencing 12 January 1987 immediately on their receipt and to make payments as soon as the claim has been determined.

Doctors (Prescribing Practice)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on how many occasions in the last two years action has been taken against doctors who habitually misprescribe, or oversubscribe, drugs.

Mr. Newton: In 1984 and 1985, the latest years for which figures are available, doctors of the Department's regional medical service made 177 and 236 visits respectively to practices where prescribing costs were more than 25 per cent. above the average of colleagues in their family practitioner committee area. During these visits advice on how to modify prescribing habits without detriment to patient care was given to 371 and 462 general medical practitioners respectively.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has powers under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to prohibit, by direction, a practitioner whom he finds has been prescribing controlled drugs in an irresponsible manner from prescribing some or all controlled drugs. Two such directions were made in respect of doctors in 1984, two in 1985 and three in 1986.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people over retirement age in the Leeds metropolitan district council area were in receipt of supplementary benefit in 1984, 1985 and at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Slimming Aids and Prophylactics

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figures of net expenditure on slimming aids and prophylactics, respectively, provided by the National Health Service for the last four complete years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the number of patients on the high priority waiting list for kidney transplants in May 1986 and *(b)* the number of patients on that list who have since been found matching kidneys for transplant.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the total number and percentage of all *(a)* local authority tenants and *(b)* private tenants in Great Britain receiving means-tested

housing assistance, including housing benefit, rent rebates, rent allowance and supplementary benefit, in each of the years from 1979 to 1986, the total cost of such payments and the average payment per recipient.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1986, c. *693-94*]: The information requested is given in the following tables, which combine information from different sources before and after the introduction of housing benefit in 1982-83.

Table 1
Rent rebate and supplementary benefit equivalent to local authority and new town corporation tenants (Great Britain)

Year	*Average number of Recipients (000)'s*	*Percentage of all LA Dwellings*	*Total Expenditure £'s (million)*	*Average Amount £'s per week*
1979-80	2,650	40	630	4·60
1980-81	2,480	44	840	5·70
1981-82	3,350	52	1,310	7·50
1982-83	3,580	57	1,750	9·40
1983-84	3,780	61	1,980	10·10
1984-85	3,790	63	2,150	10·90
1985-86	3,860	63	2,290	11·40
1986-87	3,745	63	2,418	12·40

Notes:
1. The percentage of all LA dwellings is calculated using information on dwelling stock which includes vacant properties.
2. The figure for 1986-87 has been calculated using information on 1985 dwelling stock.
3. Estimates for 1986-87 are highly provisional and are subject to revision. Those for earlier years may be subject to minor revision.

Table 2
Rent allowance and supplementary benefit equivalent to private sector tenants (Great Britain)

Year	*Average number of recipients*	*Percentage of all private tenants*	*Total expenditure*	*Average amount*
	000's		*£ million*	*£ per week*
1979-80	700	26	160	4·30
1980-81	710	27	190	5·10
1981-82	800	31	280	6·60
1982-83	840	33	380	8·70
1983-84	1,020	41	540	10·20
1984-85	1,120	46	670	11·50
1985-86	1,160	49	780	12·90
1986-87	1,190	50	1,016	16·40

Notes
1. The percentage of all private tenants is calculated using information on dwelling stock which includes vacant properties and properties where there are "nil" rents (these tenants would not be eligible for housing benefit). It also includes as one dwelling multi-occupied properties with shared facilities where there may potentially be more than one housing benefit claimant.
2. The figure for 1986-87 percentage of all private tenants has been calculated using information on 1985 dwelling stock.
3. Estimates for 1986-87 are highly provisional and are subject to revision. Those for earlier years may be subject to minor revision.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why there is a shortage of supplies in hearing aid centres of National Health Service aids in the BE30's range; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: I understand that there is no shortage of supplies of the BE30's range of hearing aids in the National Health Service. If, however, the hon. Member knows of a particular supply difficulty locally he may wish to contact the chairman of Mersey regional health authority, which has responsibility for the supply of National Health Service hearing aids.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, a person will be eligible for the severe disability premium if he uses that premium to meet the expenses of a volunteer living with him who is not under the auspices of a voluntary organisation;

(2) if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, a person will be eligible for the severe disability premium if he uses that premium to pay for a person to live with him in order to provide the assistance he requires.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: A person, other than a volunteer employed by a charitable or other organisation (except a local authority), who provides care for a severely disabled person would be entitled to claim invalid care allowance subject to the normal qualifying conditions for that benefit. Among other conditions, the severe disability premium would not be paid where invalid care allowance was in payment.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *705*, he will state what information he has on the range of charges currently being made by voluntary organisations providing volunteers to live with severely disabled people.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: The Department does not maintain information of this kind. I understand, however, that the independent living scheme organised by Community Service Volunteers to help severely disabled people in their homes charges project sponsors a placement fee of £68 a month for each volunteer. In addition, a development fee of £100 is payable by new projects on receipt of application. A variable boarding and food allowance is payable and each volunteer receives a personal payment of £15·25 a week.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the reply to the right hon.

Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw on 18 December, *Official Report*, column 705, he will state what is the number of the estimated 7,000 recipients of the severe disability premium who will be in receipt of the higher rate of attendance allowance.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: The available data do not enable reliable separate estimates to be made between those receiving the higher and lower rates of attendance allowance.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why he has decided to offer the severe disability premium only to disabled people who live alone and are in receipt of attendance allowance but who are not cared for by a person claiming invalid care allowance;

(2) on what basis it has been decided that disabled people who are cared for by someone in receipt of invalid care allowance should not qualify for the severe disability premium and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987]: The severe disability premium is intended to give help to severely disabled people who live independently in the community and who have no one to look after them. It is consistent with that aim that those who are looked after by someone receiving invalid care allowance should not be eligible for the premium.

Benefits

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the numbers who claim *(a)* unemployment benefit and *(b)* supplementary benefit as unemployed claimants; what are the total numbers who are dependent on these claimants; what are the total yearly amounts paid in unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the unemployed; and if he will publish these figures also on a regional basis.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 1 December 1986, c. 535]: The available information is given in the tables.

Regions[1]	*UB only claimants (thousands) As at 8 May 1986*	*UB and SB claimants (thousands) As at 8 May 1986*	*SB claimants (thousands) As at 8 May 1986*	*UB £ million 1985-86*	*SB £ million 1985-86*[2]
South East	184·2	48·7	405·7	395	n.a.
East Anglia	23·0	6·7	38·7	48	n.a.
South West	53·1	14·6	93·9	134	n.a.
West Midlands	69·3	19·7	199·6	131	n.a.
East Midlands	48·4	12·8	99·5	93	n.a.
Yorkshire and Humberside	79·4	19·9	168·8	144	n.a.
North West	92·4	25·6	261·2	214	n.a.
North	53·9	14·8	128·8	140	n.a.
Wales	40·9	12·2	98·5	88	n.a.
Scotland	87·3	19·3	189·2	190	n.a.
All regions[3]	731·9	194·4	1,683·9	1,577	4,100

[1] Breakdown is based on Department of Employment regions.
[2] A regional breakdown of supplementary benefit expenditure to the unemployed is not available.
[3] Figures are rounded to the nearest 100 and may, therefore, appear not to add.

The number of dependants was 150,200 for unemployment benefit claimants of whom 73,800 were also receiving supplementary benefit (at May 1986) and 1,306,000 for supplementary benefit claimants (at December 1984). In unemployment benefit cases the figure is for adult dependants only because there are no dependancy benefits for children. In supplementary benefit cases adult dependants and children are included. A regional breakdown for these figures is available only for supplementary benefit cases and is as shown in the following table.

Dependants of Unemployed SB Claimants at December 1984

(thousands)

Regions[1]	*Partners*	*Children*	*Total*
North Eastern	81	151	232
London North	64	112	176
London South	48	81	129
Midlands	88	171	259
North Western	77	146	223
Scotland	44	82	126
Wales[2]	33	59	92
South Western	26	42	68
All regions[3]	460	846	1,306

[1] DHSS regional network.
[2] Wales and South Western are parts of the same region but the figures have been separated for the purposes of comparison.
[3] Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and may, therefore appear not to add.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Intervention Stores

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the level of butter stored in intervention, and where it was stored in north Yorkshire, on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively;

(2) what was the level of grain stored in intervention, and where it was stored, in north Yorkshire, on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Gummer: The following stocks of intervention butter and grain were stored in north Yorkshire on 1 January 1987. The stocks at the beginning of 1984 and 1985 were given on 29 January 1986, at column 537. Records of storage locations in 1979 are no longer available.

	Tonnes
Butter	
Northallerton	2,239
Grain	
Melmerby	25,912
Tholthorpe	946
York	58,857

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the level of butter stored in intervention, and where it was stored in Lincolnshire, on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively;

(2) what was the level of grain stored in intervention, and where it was stored, in the county of Lincolnshire on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Gummer: The following stocks of intervention butter and grain were stored in Lincolnshire on 1 January 1987. The stocks at the beginning of 1984 and 1985 were given on 29 January 1986, at column 536. Records of storage locations in 1979 are no longer available.

	Tonnes
Butter	
Easton	1,150
Grain	
Spalding	8,235
Colsterworth	23,538
Boston	3,469
Osbournby	8,866
Grantham	66,051
Ancaster	9,288
Fulbeck Heath	1,209
Lincoln	85,412
Bracebridge Heath	18,260
Heighington	20,189
Bardney	16,806
Alford	7,412
Steeping	10,702
Skegness	5,462
Carr Lane	9,698
Owmby	9,005
Faldingworth	10,717
Holton le Clay	14,493
Hemswell	74,787
Manby	26,809

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the level of grain stored in intervention and where it was stored in Humberside on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively;

(2) what was the level of butter stored in intervention and where it was stored within Humberside on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Gummer: The following stocks of intervention butter and grain were stored in Humberside on 1 January 1987. The stocks at the beginning of 1984 and 1985 were given on 29 January 1986, at column 536. Records of storage locations in 1979 are no longer available.

Butter

	Tonnes
Hull	5,699
Grimsby	5,082
Grain	
Grimsby	7,144
Scunthorpe	92,301
Crauswick	4,937
North Ferriby	32
Hessle	25,225
Killingholme	6,323
Goxhill	4,324
King George	8,197
Hull	296
Alexandra Dock	33,150
Preston	14
Driffield	31,860

Timber

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in favour of treating timber as an agricultural crop.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In appropriate circumstances farm woodland is capable of making a useful contribution to farm income. I have received a number of representations from various organisations urging further encouragement for the planting of new woodland on farms and the better management of existing woodland.

Agricultural Expenditure

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what savings will be produced in 1987 and 1988, respectively, by the Agriculture Ministers' agreement of December.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission has estimated that the package of measures on milk, beef and green rates will reduce Community expenditure by about 940 mecu in 1987 and 330 mecu in 1988.

Alternative Land Use

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place the report of the alternative land use in the rural environment (ALURE) working party in the Library.

Mr. Jopling: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soo as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 19 January 1987

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Visits (Judges)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of his Department on visits to prisons by judges; and what guidelines he issues on how often such visits should take place.

Mr. Mellor: The Department welcomes visits by judges to penal establishments. The frequency of such visits is not a matter for us but I understand that all newly appointed assistant recorders are required by the Lord Chancellor to visit at least two establishments before they sit judicially. The Judicial Studies Board encourages all experienced judges and recorders to visit penal establishments from time to time.

Custodial Sentences

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving custodial sentences and who are under (i) 21, (ii) 25 and (iii) 30 years of age.

Mr. Mellor: The information is given in the table.

Population under sentence[1] in Prison Department establishments in England and Wales on 30 November 1986: by age and sex

[2]*Number*

Age in years	*Males*	*Females*
14 to 20	8,510	220
21 to 24	8,310	280
25 to 29	6,720	260
14 to 29	23,530	750

[1]Including persons committed in default of payment of a fine.
[2]Rounded estimates: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

Rape

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of reported cases of rape in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: Numbers of offences of rape recorded by the police in England and Wales in the years 1975 to 1985 are published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1985" (Cmnd. 10, table 2.9). Part of the increase in 1985 was due to changes in police recording practice.

Car Thefts

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of cars stolen in Greater London in each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: The number of offences of theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles recorded by the Metropolitan police and the City of London police was 86,900 in 1983; 88,000 in 1984; and 88,500 in 1985. These figures are published each year, by police force area in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables Volume 3". (Table S.3.1 of the 1985 issue.)

Repatriation

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of people assisted by Her Majesty's Government with voluntary repatriation, including their families, since 1970, together with the annual aggregate financial assistance provided.

Mr. Waddington: The principal scheme for assisting people to return permanently to an overseas country is operated under section 29 of the Immigration Act 1971 on behalf of the Government by International Social Services Great Britain Ltd. A separate facility with different conditions of eligibility is offered by the Department of Health and Social Security under the supplementary benefit scheme. The available information about the assistance provided under each scheme is as follows:

Scheme operated under section 29 of the Immigration Act 1971

Financial year	*Number of people assisted (including members of family or household)*	*Cost (Travel expenses of persons assisted plus administration costs)* £
1972-73	122	15,176
1973-74	277	41,828
1974-75	156	32,307
1975-76	221	50,636
1976-77	112	31,181
1977-78	130	46,508
1978-79	178	65,533
1979-80	131	61,991
1980-81	139	78,454
1981-82	251	169,206
1982-83	152	162,203
1983-84	144	169,259
1984-85	81	118,982
1985-86	72	120,882

People assisted by supplementary benefit scheme.

Year	*Number of people assisted*	*Cost* £
1972	213	18,940
1973	172	14,686
1974	129	16,780
1975	139	19,878
1976	90	15,710
1977	112	21,848
1978	84	16,929
1979	51	12,406
1980	44	15,791
1981	29	9,120
1982	49	16,534
1983	41	15,677
1984	36	14,435
1985	13	5,088
1986	6	2,796

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to introduce legislation to present more severe penalties in cases where pedestrians on pedestrian crossings are put at risk by drivers of motor vehicles.

Mr. Mellor: The road traffic law review which was set up by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is examining the scope and definition of road traffic offences and the penalties available. We shall give its recommendations careful consideration when it reports later in the year.

Electoral Areas

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the division of the parishes of Birchwood and Croft into electoral divisions will take place.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received a report from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England of a further electoral review of the borough of Warrington. This includes a proposal to divide the wards of what is now the single parish of Birchwood and Croft between three district wards. We shall decide whether to make an order giving effect to the commission's proposals as soon as possible after the expiry of the statutory period for representations on 28 January 1987. In view of the number of reports submitted in the last few weeks by the Local Government Boundary Commissions for England and Wales, I cannot at present say when an order relating to Warrington is likely to be made.

Television Reception

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those areas which have been provided with free additional equipment to improve television reception, with his estimate of the number of persons who have thus been assisted in each case.

Mr. Mellor: None. Licences under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 to install transmitting equipment to improve television reception have always been issued on the basis that the licensee would be responsible for obtaining the equipment conforming with the terms of the licence. About 200 such licences have so far been issued. The number of individuals assisted in each case has varied considerably from case to case, but in all about 15,000 people have benefited. If the hon. Member would like details of the schemes for which licences have been issued, I shall be happy to write to him.

Bus and Coach Drivers (Prosecutions)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the cumulative total of bus and coach drivers successfully prosecuted for exceeding the 70 mph speed limit on Britain's motorways in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: No reliable information is available for specific types of vehicle. The available information relates to total findings of guilt in magistrates' courts for exceeding 70 mph limits on motorways and is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table 5 of the issue for 1985), copies of which are in the Library.

Myra Hindley

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects an accurate costing for the visit of Myra Hindley to Saddleworth Moor to become available.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of the Greater Manchester police that the additional cost to the police service of Myra Hindley's visit to Saddleworth Moor was £12,000.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Avon and Somerset as to what items of equipment relevant to an incident involving radioactivity are available from stores located in Avon and Somerset for use by police of the Avon and Somerset constabulary; what number of *(a)* personal dosimeters, *(b)* other radiation meters, *(c)* sets of protective clothing and *(d)* breathing units, are available from such stores; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Avon and Somerset as to what training facilities are used by the Avon and Somerset constabulary for couses in dealing with incidents involving radioactivity; what number of officers have attended such courses in each of the last five years; what training is given in the use of relevant equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Philippine Citizens (Admissions)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes there have been in the rules for admitting Philippine citizens to the United Kingdom for permanent and temporary work and for the admittance of their dependants, respectively, over the past 10 years.

Mr. Waddington: There are no rules relating specifically to nationals of the Philippines and those seeking admission to the United Kingdom must qualify under the relevant provisions of the immigration rules (currently HC 169, as amended). Throughout the last 10 years, overseas nationals wishing to work here have generally required work permits. The criteria for the issue of work permits were changed in 1980 and permits are now only available for jobs requiring a high level of skill or experience for which no labour is available within the European Community.

Prison Chapels

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 14 January, if he will list those prison chapels which are used as cinemas.

Mr. Mellor: The prison chapels used as cinemas are the following:

Pentonville
Winchester
Birmingham
Stafford
Gloucester
Manchester
Liverpool
Leeds
Lincoln

Bail Applications

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of bail applications

which have been refused during the years 1983, 1984 and 1985; how many bail applications for scheduled offences have been granted for the same years; and how many of those granted bail did not comply with its conditions during the same years.

Mr. Mellor: Not all the information requested is available. The number of persons remanded on bail and the number remanded in custody is published, for each offence group, in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (chapter 8 of the issue for 1985, Cmnd. 10) No information is collected centrally on the number of persons who do not comply with conditions of their bail.

Bilingual Fixed Penalty Tickets

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether police forces in Wales are authorised to produce fixed penalty tickets in a bilingual, Welsh/English format.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is nothing in law to prevent the police from producing and issuing bilingual fixed penalty notices, but in the light of the practical difficulties that would result for the administration of the new fixed penalty system, no police force at present does so.

Heysel Stadium Disaster

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in view of the economic circumstances of many of the defendants, he will consider making an order directing that the extradition proceedings in connection with the Heysel stadium disaster be heard before a stipendiary magistrate sitting in Liverpool.

Mr. Mellor: The Extradition Acts 1870 and 1895 provide that extradition proceedings must be held before the Bow street magistrate except where it would be dangerous to the life of the accused or prejudicial to his health to move him to Bow street. We are, however, considering the suggestion made by the hon. Member, and will write to him.

Metropolitan Police Area (Crime Statistics)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many crimes in total, and how many crimes of violence were committed in each district of the Metropolitan Police in 1978 and in each year since;

(2) how many burglaries were committed in each district of the Metropolitan Police in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987, c. *75*]: Total notifiable offences recorded by the police in each London borough in the years 1978 and 1980-83 are published in each "Annual Abstract of Greater London Statistics: 1983-84, Volume 16" (Table 147), a copy of which is the Library. Recently more detailed figures, including those for violence against the person, burglary and other main offence groups have been placed in the Library and I will arrange for further tables to be added to extend the series back to 1982. More detailed information for earlier years can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) how many murders were committed in each district of the Metropolitan Police in 1978 and in each year since;

(2) how many murders were cleared up by the Metropolitan Police in 1978 and each year since; and what percentage this represents of total murders in their area.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January, c. *75*]: In the absence of a court decision, it is not always possible to distinguish offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide; they are collectively known as homicide. Numbers of offences of homicide recorded and cleared up by the Metropolitan police are published each year in the annual "Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis" (appendix 4(ii) of the report for 1985, Cmnd. 9790). A breakdown of the recorded homicides by district would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were cautioned formally for sexual offences *(a)* in each Metropolitan police district and *(b)* in the Metropolitan police area in 1978 and in each year since.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 January 1987, c. *75*]: Information about cautions by police force area and offence group is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" [table 35(a) for 1978; table 34(a) for 1979; and table 3.7A of vol 3 of the supplementary tables from 1980.] Details of cautioning by district could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Prison Sentences

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* such information as is available to show the average sentence given, and the actual sentence served, for *(a)* rape and *(b)* attempted rape, *(c)* manslaughter, *(d)* occasioning grievous bodily harm and *(e)* murder in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 8 December 1986, Vol. 107, c. *80*]: The readily available information is given in the table. Information for all years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The comparison between the sentence served and the sentence imposed can only be made on discharge; thus the sentence lengths reflect sentencing decisions taken in previous years. Information on sentencing in each year is to be found in "Criminal Statistics" (chapter 7 of the Command Paper and supplementary volumes 1 and 2).

The average time served under sentence is reduced by time spent on remand, remission and parole. Changes during this period included a significant increase in the average time spent on remand, a reduction in the minimum qualifying period for parole (affecting mainly sentences under 3 years), and a more restricted policy on parole for those serving sentences of over 5 years for offences of violence. Also between 1980 and 1985 both the average sentence length and the average time spent under sentence were reduced by the changes in the sentencing structure for young offenders which came into effect in May 1983. Under the Sexual Offences Act 1985 the maximum sentence for attempted rape was increased to life imprisonment.

The average time served by those released on licence from life sentences does not fully reflect the longest periods

likely to be served by some of those given life sentences following the abolition of capital punishment in 1965 who have not yet been released. Fuller information on the time served by all persons received under life sentences is given in table 4(e) of "Prison Statistics England and Wales 1985", (Cmnd. 9903). In accordance with the statement made by the then Home Secretary in November 1983, offenders convicted of the most heinous murders can normally expect to serve at least 20 years in custody, and there will be cases where the gravity of the offence requires a still longer period to be served.

Average sentence length imposed and average time spent under sentence in Prison Department establishments in England and Wales by persons discharged in 1976, 1980 or 1985 from sentences for murder, manslaughter, rape or wounding

Months/years

Year of discharge	*Offence*	*Determinate sentences*		*Average time spent under indeterminate sentences*[1]	
		Average sentence length[4] *(months)*	*Average time spent under sentence*[1] *(months)*	*Borstal training (months)*	*Life sentences (years)*
1976	Murder	Life	[6]	[6]	10½
	Manslaughter	46·5	23·1	8·9	
	Rape[2]	45·7	24·3		
	Wounding[2 3]	14·2	8·3		
1980	Murder	Life	[6]	[6]	10½
	Manslaughter	57·3	26·0	8·3	
	Rape[2]	48·3	23·4		
	Wounding[2 3]	12·5	6·9		
1985	Murder	Life	[6]	[6]	10
	Manslaughter	50·3[5]	21·8[5]		
	Rape[2]	42·9[5]	20·4[5]		
	Wounding[2 3]	10·5[5]	5·1[5]		

[1] On completion of sentence or release on licence: excluding those discharged following a recall from parole or licence or for other reasons eg successful appeal, transfer out of Prison Department establishments. Excludes any time spent on remand in custody or in non-Prison Department establishments.
[2] Including attempts.
[3] Including assault occasioning grievous bodily harm.
[4] Sentence length reflects any consecutive sentences and any appeals; the offence recorded is the principle offence.
[5] Including sentences of youth custody.
[6] Not applicable.

Welsh Prisoners

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that every prisoner whose home is in Wales may be held within a prison in Wales if he or she so wishes.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, Vol. 1, c. 734]: The only accommodation presently available for male offenders in Wales is in Cardiff and Swansea prisons, and these are already fully committed as local prisons for male adults serving the courts in south and mid-Wales. There are also two male young offender establishments, Usk and Prescoed camp, in Wales and we try to accommodate Welsh young offenders in them if their home is nearby. There is no facilty for female prisoners to be held in Wales.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy relating to the level of funds available to meet third party claims for damages resulting from a nuclear accident.

Mr. Goodlad: I have been asked to reply.

The Nuclear Installations Act 1965, as amended, provides, in the first instance, for funds up to the sterling equivalent of 300 million SDR (currently about £250 million) to be available to satisfy compensation claims in the event of a nuclear accident. Beyond that, the Act provides that claims shall be satisfied to such extent and out of funds provided by such means as Parliament may determine.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Irish Republic (Agreements)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement or in the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, or in any other exchanges with the Government of the Irish Republic, Her Majesty's Government requested re-affirmation, or classification, of the supplementary agreement fixing the area of Northern Ireland and continued by the Ireland (Confirmation of Agreement) Act 1925, following the Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland and His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom; and what conversations have occurred between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Irish Republic on the international status and continuing validity of the said agreement and legislation.

Mr. Eggar: The question of the 1925 boundary agreement or the Ireland (Confirmation of Agreement) Act 1925 which gave it legislative confirmation, did not

arise in the negotiations leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement; nor have there been any recent conversations about it with the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

Helsinki Final Act

Mr. Knowles asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *760*, when he expects the current examination by the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe follow-up meeting in Vienna of the record of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Eastern European countries in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act to be completed.

Mr. Renton: The Vienna CSCE follow-up meeting reconvenes on 27 January. The formal exchange of views on implementation of the Helsinki Final Act is scheduled to end at the beginning of February. However, the United Kingdom delegation will be able at any stage of the meeting to raise specific aspects of the performance of the Soviet Union and eastern European countries which are of concern.

Gibraltar

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement about his recent discussions with the Spanish Foreign Minister in respect of Gibraltar.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend met the Spanish Foreign Minister in London on 13 and 14 January. Their meeting was part of the process of co-operation and negotiation between Britain and Spain, started by the Brussels Agreement of 27 November 1984. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Sir Joshua Hassan, were also present as members of the British delegation.

The Foreign Ministers reviewed progress in co-operation between Gibraltar and Spain. They agreed that it should continue to take place on a fair and balanced basis, consistent with their common Community obligations. They noted that contacts had developed satisfactorily in a number of fields including tourism, the environment, culture and sport, public health and education. They agreed that the creation of economic and cultural working groups was desirable subject to terms of reference being agreed. Officials were instructed to pursue this.

The two Ministers also discussed co-operation in the civil use of Gibraltar airport and instructed officials to resume their study of the matter.

As provided for in the Brussels agreement, there was a full discussion of sovereignty. Snr. Fernandez Ordonez underlined the importance of proposals put forward by Spain in February 1985. My right hon. and learned Friend reaffirmed our commitment to honour the wishes of the people of Gibraltar, as set out in the preamble of their 1969 Constitution. He stressed the importance of managing any differences between Britain and Spain in a spirit consistent with their links of traditional friendship and their common membership of the European Community and NATO.

The two Ministers agreed to meet again in Madrid in accordance with the pattern already established.

ENVIRONMENT

Tobacco Industry (Sports Sponsorship)

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has now concluded the negotiations between himself and the tobacco industry on the sponsorship of sport and sporting events; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I am pleased to announce that the negotiations have been completed and the Government have reached a new voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry on sports sponsorship in the United Kingdom. The agreement came into effect today and will run until at least 31 October 1989.

The effect of the new agreement is that: overall expenditure on sponsorship activities will be reduced; the companies will not sponsor events designed to appeal mainly to spectators under 18 years old; media advertising will not depict any participants in a sport; the size of health warnings on signs at televised events will be increased by 50 per cent.; there will be tighter controls over the siting of signs at televised events; the agreement will be monitored by the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship, which is chaired by Sir Peter Lazarus.

These provisions have been incorporated into the detailed text of an agreement, copies of which are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Government are grateful to the tobacco companies for the way in which they have pursued the negotiations and for accepting more specific controls over their sponsorship activities, particularly where the event concerned is to be televised.

London Docklands

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes are currently for sale within the London docklands which have been developed on sites provided by the corporation at prices *(a)* below £50,000, *(b)* between £50,000 and £100,000 and *(c)* above £100,000.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to the hon. Member.

Housing

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of tenancies currently existing which fall within the provisions of the Rent Act 1957.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Council Tenants

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will increase the compensation payments to council tenants who are compulsorily transferred to another council tenancy.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Big Ben

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effects of the recent cold weather on the operation of Big Ben.

Mr. Chope: On 12 and 13 January the cold weather caused a problem with the chimes of the Great Clock. The normally flexible pads, which regulate the strength of the strike of the bell hammers, became hardened in the extremely low temperatures in the belfry. This affected the hour striking bell, Big Ben, and also one of the quarter-chiming bells. These failed to sound on a number of occasions, the hardened pads preventing the hammers making contact with the bells.

A method has been found of warming the pads sufficiently to restore their flexibility and all the bells are now producing their familiar sound.

Grant-related Expenditure

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the number of local authorities receiving grant-related expenditure on the criterion that an airport is situated in their area.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends that, for the 1987-88 rate support grant settlement, 30 local authorities will receive grant-related expenditure for debt charges retained by local authorities where airport companies are established under the Airports Act 1986. Estimates of the debt charges remaining, totalling £9·9 million, are as follows:

Local Authority	*Airports Debt Charges GRE (£ Million)*
Luton	1·067
Bournemouth	0·171
Southend	0·043
Blackpool	0·114
Norwich	0·114
Merseyside Transport Authority	0·726
Gateshead	0·031
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	0·031
North Tyneside	0·031
South Tyneside	0·031
Sunderland	0·031
Birmingham	0·529
Coventry	0·529
Dudley	0·529
Sandwell	0·529
Solihull	0·529
Walsall	0·529
Wolverhampton	0·529
Bradford	0·962
Calderdale	0·168
Kirklees	0·168
Leeds	0·962
Wakefield	0·168
Cleveland	0·142
Devon	0·441
Dorset	0·171
Durham	0·192
Humberside	0·156
Norfolk	0·185
Northumberland	0·092
England	9·900

Local Authorities (Development Proposals)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the incidence of local authorities giving themselves planning permission for a housing development prior to holding a public inquiry into the development proposal.

Mr. Tracey: The Department's evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment's investigation of appeals, call-in and major public inquiries, reported:

"in the year April 1984—March 1985 a little over 12,300 deemed permissions were granted. Of these almost 1,400 in respect of land vested in local authorities but where the development was to be carried out by others. We do not know how many of these permissions represented departures from development plans".

Nor do we know in how many cases a public inquiry was held. The Select Committee recommended in its subsequent report that

"the Department conducts a thoroughgoing review of the procedures by which local authorities grant themselves planning permission".

In their response (Cmnd. 43) the Government noted that the Department is reviewing the working of the 1976 General Regulations, which prescribe the relevant procedures.

British Board of Agrement

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the progress, morale and performance of the British Board of Agrement since 6 June 1984.

Mr. John Patten: Agrement certificates are now recognised, under the building control system introduced in November 1985, as documents which demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the building regulations. The number of valid certificates has increased from 534 in May 1984 to 643 in November 1986. Between December 1985 and November 1986, the board issued 207 certificates, of which 73 were replacements for old ones "recast" in a new format.

Progress towards financial self-sufficiency, which it was forecast would be achieved in financial year 1987-88, is proving slower than anticipated, but grant in aid paid to the board as a proportion of turnover is down, from 31 per cent. in 1984-85 to about 20 per cent. (estimated) for 1986-87.

National Building Agency

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will bring up to date the table set out by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) on 5 June 1984 regarding the financing of the National Building Agency; and whether the accounts for this body have now been finalised, and the organisation finally dissolved.

Mr. John Patten: The following payments have been made by the Department to meet the closure costs and net liabilities of the National Building Agency over the last three years. There are no other amendments to the June 1984 table.

1984-85	100,000 (reduced from the figure shown in the "grant-in-aid" column in the 1984 table)
1985-86	142,257
1986-87	74,500 (latest estimate)

The liquidators have now wound up most of the agency's affairs, but final dissolution cannot take place until all outstanding claims have been settled.

Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what basis the transfer of

development corporation houses belonging to Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation will take place; how the sale price and repair liability will be determined; and what provisions will be made for tenant involvement;

(2) what questions will be asked of the tenants of Warrington and Runcorn New Town Development Corporation in the survey to determine whom they would like to be the new owners of their rented property; if he will be bound by the results of the survey; when the survey will be carried out; and who will undertake it.

Mr. John Patten: These are matters on which decisions still have to be taken.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses owned by local authorities are currently registered as being empty; if he will break them down by local authority; how many have been unoccupied for more than 12 months; what information he has as to the number in need of urgent repair; what plans he has to deal with the problem; how many people are registered as homeless; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: At national level, the information requested by my hon. Friend is as follows. Local authorities reported that, at 1 April 1986, they had 113,300 vacant dwellings; 27,100 of these had been vacant for over one year; 38,600 were being improved or repaired; and 18,800 were awaiting improvement or repair. At 31 March 1986, there were 15,400 households reported by local authorities as in temporary accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985; in the preceding year, authorities accepted responsibility for securing accommodation for 97,100 households under those provisions. Figures for individual local authorities are in the Library: numbers of vacant dwellings are in pages 1.6 to18.6 and 1.7 to 18.7 of the "HIP1 (1986) all items print" and the households in temporary accommodation at 31 March 1986 in table 9*(a)* of "Local Housing Statistics No. 78".

In our view, local authorities can reduce the number of their dwellings standing empty if they implement a number of good management practices, in particular faster reletting procedures and better planned repair and maintenance operations. They also have scope for letting or leasing property for short-life use; if it is let to a registered housing association, they may claim housing association grant to make it fit for short-term letting. Estate Action (UHRU) provides advice and resources for authorities on bringing rundown estates up to an acceptable standard, thereby reducing numbers of difficult-to-let and empty properties. And we are currently consulting on a proposed general consent for local authorities to let empty homes awaiting repair or demolition to housing associations on leases of up to five years.

Inspectorate of Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will specify the staffing levels of the new inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is expected that the staff complement of the inspectorate when formed on 1 April will be about 190. This figure includes posts which may be transferred to departmental policy directorates after review of the organisation in the first year.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that all recommendations to central Government emanating from the new inspectorate of pollution will be statutorily available to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The inspectorate will form part of my Department and will tender advice to Ministers under normal Civil Service rules. It will publish an annual report with a full account of its activities and local reports where applicable and will issue technical advisory and guidance documents.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the specific powers of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Waldegrave: The formation of the inspectorate will not affect the statutory basis of pollution control. The inspectorate's powers at 1 April and the development of its functions are discussed in a consultation paper, copies of which I placed in the Library of the House last week.

Rate Support Grant

Sir Hugh Rossi asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect his recent statements on the rate support grant and rate limitation will have upon ratepayers in the London borough of Haringey in the coming financial year.

Dr. Boyson: My right hon. Friend announced on 13 January that after the passing of the Local Government Finance Bill he intends to make the Rate Support Grant (England) Report 1987-88 under which Haringey will receive £69 million block grant—£18 million more than this year—if it spends at its expenditure level of £153 million, determined for it last July, and to determine a rate limit for Haringey of 239·27p, a reduction of 6 per cent. on its 1986-87 rate.

Mr. Leadbitter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effects of his statement on the rate support grant of 13 January, *Official Report*, column 147, on Cleveland county council, relative to the position as previously announced in his proposals of 3 December.

Mr. Chope: The effect of my right hon. Friend's announcement of 13 January on Cleveland county council is that it will receive £99 million block grant — an increase of £8 million from its position under my right hon. Friend's proposals of 3 December—if it spends at the settlement spending assumption.

Central Council for Physical Recreation

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the cost to central Government of funding the Central Council for Physical Recreation in each of the last six years; and if he will express this annual cost as a percentage of the Sports Council grant.

Mr. Tracey: It is for the Sports Council to determine what grant can be given to the Central Council of Physical Recreation. The figures are as follows:

	SC grant £ million	CCPR grant Actual	CCPR grant as percentage of SC grant
1980-81	19·288	153,228	0·8
1981-82	21·032	150,213	0·7
1982-83	23·752	233,032	0·9
1983-84	27·123	187,688	0·7
1984-85	29·349	300,300	1·0
1985-86	30·612	258,209	0·8

Rating (Rural Communities)

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek power to institute a differential rating scheme for small shops and post offices in rural communities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I will answer this question shortly.

Council House Sales

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in the county of Avon in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The numbers of right-to-buy sales, and other sales to sitting tenants by councils in the county of Avon, are given in the following issues of "Local Housing Statistics" which are available in the Library:

Year	Issue No.
1983-84	75
1984-85	79
1985-86	79

Subsequent to the publication of issue No. 79, Bristol has reported 1,313 sales to sitting tenants in 1984/85 and 903 in 1985/86.

Corresponding figures for each local authority in Avon for the period 1 April to 30 September 1986 are:

	Numbers
Bath	62
Bristol	359
Kingswood	49
Northavon	64
Wansdyke	[1]37
Woodspring	97

[1] 1 April to 30 June only.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to reimburse the Sandwell metropolitan borough council for expenditure incurred under the Housing Defects Act and subsequent amendment.

Mr. Tracey: It is already the Secretary of State's practice, under section 569 of the Housing Act 1985, to make Exchequer contributions to local authorities in respect of allowable expenditure under the Housing Defects Act and subsequent amendment.

National Mobility Scheme

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council tenants successfully found new accommodation under the national mobility scheme during the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Tracey: The national mobility steering committee report for 1985-86 shows that 6,840 tenants were successful in finding new accommodation under the national mobility scheme. The organisation estimates that about 5,700 of these were council tenants.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* all those universities which provide undergraduate or postgraduate courses in departments of developments studies; what changes have occurred to student numbers in those departments since the beginning of the academic year in 1979 to the present academic year; and what information he has on the changes which have occurred in the percentage of the total cash available to each university going to these departments over the same period.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In 1979 Birmingham, East Anglia and Kent universities ran undergraduate courses intitled development studies and in 1986 East Anglia, Kent and Swansea ran such courses. These were not all run by departments of development studies. They covered a variety of options mainly in the economics, geography, political and sociology fields which were also included as options in courses at other universities. In 1986, 32 universities offered postgraduate taught or research courses in development studies which also covered a wide range of options. Information on the numbers of students studying the different options is not readily available centrally. Information is not available centrally on expenditure by individual departments (the classification of which varies between universities).

Local Education Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* for each local education authority in England *(a)* the capital bid submitted for 1987-88, *(b)* the allocation announced, *(c)* the allocation as a percentage of the bid in each case and *(d)* the 1986-87 allocation in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is as follows:

Local Education Authority	1987-88 LEA's plans (£ thousands)	1987-88 Allocation (£ thousands)	1987-88 Allocation as percentage of plans	1986-87 Allocation (£ thousands)
Barking	2,126	806	38	1,135
Barnet	11,234	1,744	16	1,621
Bexley	2,692	1,641	61	715
Brent	8,249	2,514	30	1,589
Bromley	3,283	1,618	49	1,747
Croydon	5,305	2,428	46	2,784
Ealing	7,624	2,147	28	2,154
Enfield	2,980	1,222	41	706
Haringey	8,427	1,121	13	797
Harrow	5,525	2,952	53	4,078
Havering	1,093	393	36	395
Hillingdon	3,782	1,059	28	306
Hounslow	5,259	1,255	24	668
Kingston-upon-Thames	9,674	1,683	17	1,806
Merton	2,390	1,054	44	1,203
Newham	5,000	1,165	23	1,271
Redbridge	2,935	1,761	60	1,149
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,275	115	9	249
Sutton	1,966	247	13	329
Waltham Forest	5,276	2,585	49	2,184
Inner London	44,342	14,957	34	12,575
Birmingham	11,141	3,860	35	5,016
Coventry	12,364	5,709	46	5,396
Dudley	5,067	1,329	26	2,012
Sandwell	2,955	576	19	1,203
Solihull	1,778	500	28	1,295
Walsall	2,483	824	33	1,119
Wolverhampton	7,088	1,932	27	1,418
Knowsley	5,510	1,108	20	1,483
Liverpool	10,072	1,885	19	2,904
St. Helens	4,953	855	17	772
Sefton	4,616	1,790	39	2,667
Wirral	4,826	1,316	27	1,402
Bolton	1,934	645	33	576
Bury	996	320	32	882
Manchester	32,669	8,968	27	6,501
Oldham	4,809	2,799	58	1,428
Rochdale	5,493	2,220	40	2,163
Salford	3,016	1,882	62	1,625
Stockport	4,004	1,243	31	1,453
Tameside	1,884	389	21	306
Trafford	2,947	1,064	36	1,276
Wigan	4,550	2,717	60	2,339
Barnsley	1,073	530	49	577
Doncaster	403	365	91	338
Rotherham	2,336	287	12	578
Sheffield	10,762	3,197	30	2,330
Bradford	24,853	6,303	25	7,061
Calderdale	3,381	1,883	56	1,203
Kirklees	8,782	1,664	19	1,956
Leeds	12,502	2,802	22	2,634
Wakefield	5,210	2,074	40	1,990
Gateshead	4,073	1,112	27	1,451
Newcastle upon Tyne	9,479	3,369	36	2,586
North Tyneside	4,498	1,935	43	1,536
South Tyneside	5,121	1,932	38	732
Sunderland	13,391	2,305	17	1,928
Isles of Scilly	60	30	50	—
Avon	10,865	4,386	40	4,070
Bedfordshire	4,814	1,248	26	1,934
Berkshire	8,281	3,597	43	5,399
Buckinghamshire	10,384	6,004	58	5,582
Cambridgeshire	10,016	3,399	34	2,591
Cheshire	9,420	5,043	54	3,837
Cleveland	8,539	4,351	51	4,933

Local Education Authority	1987-88 LEA's plans (£ thousands)	1987-88 Allocation (£ thousands)	1987-88 Allocation as percentage of plans	1986-87 Allocation (£ thousands)
Cornwall	8,061	5,645	70	3,592
Cumbria	6,224	2,852	46	2,254
Derbyshire	20,028	9,036	45	7,202
Devon	11,291	4,734	42	8,418
Dorset	9,577	4,349	45	3,377
Durham	6,263	1,371	22	2,231
East Sussex	15,038	4,884	32	3,786
Essex	34,169	11,600	34	11,417
Gloucestershire	10,302	7,167	70	6,561
Hampshire	28,643	10,918	38	12,905
Hereford and Worcester	5,633	2,585	46	1,929
Hertfordshire	14,293	4,100	29	4,677
Humberside	14,865	10,753	72	7,524
Isle of Wight	3,192	1,375	43	1,139
Kent	13,345	7,514	56	6,405
Lancashire	18,800	5,994	32	12,538
Leicestershire	13,336	5,526	41	7,061
Lincolnshire	7,745	4,625	60	3,908
Norfolk	7,864	5,019	64	4,394
North Yorkshire	5,150	2,035	40	2,504
Northamptonshire	5,132	1,726	37	4,339
Northumberland	2,060	655	32	1,003
Nottinghamshire	5,512	2,379	43	3,043
Oxfordshire	11,326	1,942	17	2,055
Shropshire	8,486	5,257	62	2,602
Somerset	6,220	2,626	42	2,014
Staffordshire	18,219	7,591	42	9,313
Suffolk	8,830	6,683	76	5,866
Surrey	9,339	3,828	41	3,610
Warwickshire	3,473	1,101	32	1,236
West Sussex	7,420	1,739	23	2,157
Wiltshire	7,021	3,177	45	1,983

Schools (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the capital allocation made to each local education authority for expenditure on schools, in cash and constant prices, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the bid made by each local education authority for a capital allocation for expenditure on schools for 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is as follows:

	1987-88 LEAs Plans £ (000's)
Barking	634
Barnet	3,289
Bexley	2,461
Brent	6,436
Bromley	3,193
Croydon	4,264
Ealing	4,582
Enfield	2,285
Haringey	7,615
Harrow	1,784
Havering	1,091
Hillingdon	3,669
Hounslow	4,840
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,074
Merton	2,306
Newham	4,651
Redbridge	2,883
Richmond-upon-Thames	745
Sutton	1,771
Waltham Forest	4,954
Inner London	25,996
Birmingham	6,554
Coventry	6,062
Dudley	3,912
Sandwell	2,073
Solihull	1,508
Walsall	2,273
Wolverhampton	2,539
Knowsley	4,345
Liverpool	3,742
St. Helens	1,635
Sefton	4,246
Wirral	4,326
Bolton	729
Bury	929
Manchester	22,048
Oldham	4,435
Rochdale	4,983
Salford	2,160
Stockport	3,606
Tameside	1,519
Trafford	2,681
Wigan	4,200
Barnsley	1,073
Doncaster	403
Rotherham	2,071
Sheffield	5,954

	1987-88 LEAs Plans £ (000's)
Bradford	22,196
Calderdale	3,181
Kirklees	2,181
Leeds	10,072
Wakefield	4,510
Gateshead	4,073
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,058
North Tyneside	4,304
South Tyneside	3,687
Sunderland	6,859
Isles of Scilly	60
Avon	7,342
Bedfordshire	4,402
Berkshire	6,864
Buckinghamshire	7,648
Cambridgshire	8,356
Cheshire	7,306
Cleveland	6,554
Cornwall	6,679
Cumbria	4,626
Derbyshire	16,687
Devon	9,858
Dorset	6,364
Durham	5,092
East Sussex	9,046
Essex	28,670
Gloucestershire	8,145
Hampshire	19,085
Hereford and Worcester	3,918
Hertfordshire	7,766
Humbershire	12,466
Isle of Wight	2,547
Kent	10,997
Lancashire	11,319
Leicestershire	7,773
Lincolnshire	7,062
Norfolk	7,050
North Yorkshire	2,878
Northamptonshire	4,036
Northumberland	1,768
Nottinghamshire	3,732
Oxfordshire	4,621
Shropshire	7,629
Somerset	5,173
Staffordshire	10,941
Suffolk	7,715
Surrey	6,399
Warwickshire	2,693
West Sussex	6,238
Wiltshire	5,455

Grammar Schools

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many grammar schools have closed in each year since 1970.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. The number of grammar schools in England has fallen over the years as shown in the table below:

January each year	Number of grammar schools
1970	975
1971	918
1972	850
1973	783
1974	655
1975	547
1976	459
1977	390
1978	305
1979	254
1980	218
1981	200
1982	185
1983	175
1984	175
1985	171
1986	155

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total expenditure on the assisted places scheme in each year since its introduction.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	Expenditure £ million
1981-82	3·002
1982-83	8·691
1983-84	14·995
1984-85	22·152
1985-86	29·569

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the number of assisted places pupils and *(b)* the percentage of all such pupils in respect of the income schedule for the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The latest available information relates to the school year 1985-86 and is as follows:

Income bands	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage distribution
Up to £6,376	7,889	39·3
£6,377—£6,750	692	3·4
£6,751—£7,300	943	4·7
£7,301—£8,400	2,102	10·5
£8,401—£10,080	3,285	16·3
£10,081—£12,280	3,394	16·9
£12,281 upwards	1,779	8·9

Secondary Education

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of grammar schools in each local education auhority retaining selective secondary education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The number of grammar schools in the local education authorities in England which in January 1986 had retained selective education are given below.

Grammar schools

	Number
Barnet	2
Bexley	2

	Number
Bromley	2
Enfield	1
Kingston-upon-Thames	2
Redbridge	2
Sutton	4
Birmingham	8
Walsall	2
Wolverhampton	1
Wirral	4
Trafford	8
Calderdale	2
Kirklees	1
Avon	2
Berkshire	6
Buckinghamshire	14
Devon	9
Dorset	6
Essex	8
Gloucestershire	10
Kent	28
Lancashire	4
Lincolnshire	15
North Yorkshire	3
Shropshire	2
Warwickshire	5
Wiltshire	2
Total England	155

Student Awards

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the research into student grants and loans being conducted by the Review Committee on Student Awards will be made public, as well as the evidence submitted to the review by outside bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To assist the review in its work, my Department intends to commission an independent survey into students' income and expenditure. I would expect to publish the findings.

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will name the composition of the Review Committee on Student Awards chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden).

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The review committee on student awards is composed of Ministers and officials from my Department, the Treasury, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of Employment, the Scottish Education Department, Welsh Office Education Department and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his recent discussions concerning teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since Christmas I have met representatives of the Professional Association of Teachers on 6 January, representatives of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers on 12 January, and local authority representatives on 15 January. I remain willing to have further discussion with these and other interested groups and will be meeting representatives of the NUT on 21 January.

Natural History and Geological Museums (Attendances)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1986 reported by the Natural History Museum, comprising its outstations and the Geological Museum, together with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1985.

Mr. Walden: The figures are as follows:

	1985	*1986*	*Percentage increase decrease*
British Museum (Natural History)	2,641,806	2,678,175	+1·4
Geological Museum	579,465	444,202	−23·3
Tring Zoological Museum	133,080	117,080	−11·9
TOTAL	3,354,351	3,239,685	−3·4

Road Safety Education

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if all schools in England comply with the Vienna conference of Transport Ministers' (1971) recommendation that a minimum number of hours, between 10 and 20, should be allocated for road safety education on the basis of the scale drawn up by the Vienna conference for the different classes and levels.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not available.

Student Support

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish proposals arising from the current review of student support; what period of time is likely to be made available for discussion and consultation on such proposals; what is the earliest academic year in which any such proposals are likely to be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The work of the student support review is expected to be completed this year. The timetable for consultation and implementation will depend on the outcome of the review and the nature of any changes to the student support system that the Government may decide to propose.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a list showing, for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total amount paid by his Department in respect of mandatory student awards made by local education authorities, *(b)* the change in percentage terms of the total amount paid in relation to the preceding year, *(c)* the number of mandatory awards made and *(d)* the change in percentage terms of the average amount of departmental expenditure on each mandatory award in relation to the preceding year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is as follows:

Mandatory awards

England and Wales

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
(a) DES contribution towards expenditure on mandatory awards (£000)	298,988	358,424	399,012	424,787	451,869	432,203
(b) Percentage change compared with each preceding year	—	+19·9	+11·3	+6·5	+6·4	−4·4
(c) Nos. of mandatory award-holders	322,595	334,575	354,483	370,530	384,621	387,361
(d) Average DES contribution (£) percentage change compared with each preceding year	927	1,071	1,126	1,146	1,175	1,116
	—	+15·5	+5·1	+1·8	+2·5	−5·0

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish a response to the first report of the Education, Science and Arts Committee on student awards; what steps he has taken to protect the possibility of a substantial increase being made in levels of student awards for 1987-88 within public expenditure limits; when he expects to announce the levels of student awards for 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I hope to announce the levels of student awards shortly, and I cannot anticipate that announcement. I would expect the Government's response to the first report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee to be published before the summer recess.

National Curriculum

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the establishment of a national curriculum for schools; if he will consult local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As I told the North of England education conference on 9 January, I favour establishing a national curriculum which works through national criteria for each subject area of the curriculum. These criteria must be capable of change and development; and must be arrived at by a process of national dialogue, in which local education authorities would be among those with a part to play. I also said that I should now like to hear from those concerned, both within the education service and outside it, where they stand on this matter. I am sending to my hon. Friend a copy of the speech I made on 9 January.

Helsinki Agreement

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how the money set aside by him to support the Helsinki agreement has been used; and if he will list the activities related to article V(8) and VI(5) of the Anglo-Soviet cultural agreement which have been supported.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with the informatiom requested.

PRIME MINISTER

La Belle Disco Bombing (Berlin)

Mr. Dobson asked the Prime Minister when she last asked the Federal German Government if they had any evidence of Syrian involvement in the bombing of the La Belle disco in Berlin.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answers which I gave to the hon. Member on 12 January at column 3.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister what plans exist about who would be responsible for the decision whether to use British nuclear weapons in the event of all members of the Government being killed in hostilities.

The Prime Minister: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to discuss arrangements for nuclear weapons release.

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Prime Minister if she will publish a table showing forecast spending at 1986 prices, on regional development grants in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales in each year from now until 1989-90; and if she will publish the figures for spending on regional development grants, at 1986 prices, for each year from 1979-80 for England, Scotland and Wales.

The Prime Minister: I will reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kenya (AIDS)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help Her Majesty's Government have offered the Government of Kenya to combat the spread of AIDS.

Mr. Chris Patten: We are giving substantial support to the World Health Organisation to help combat the spread of AIDS in several countries, including Kenya. We are ready to consider further requests for help in association with the WHO, to complement what we have already given.

TRANSPORT

Passenger Transport Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the 1987-88 expenditure levels for all six passenger transport authorities and the comparable figure for 1986-87.

Mr. David Mitchell: Under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill the normal precept limitation processes under the Rates Act 1984 have had to be suspended in respect of 1987-88. Instead, it is intended that

maximum precepts should be prescribed by means of a formula which will apply a standard uplift of 2 per cent. to the expenditure levels which were proposed for the six PTAs last July. The following are the relevant figures:

2 per cent. Uplift	*Redetermined expenditure level 1986-87*		*1987-88 Original expenditure level*
	£ million	£ million	£ million
Greater Manchester	83·5	74·1	75·582
Merseyside	81·3	67·7	69·054
South Yorkshire	59·3	45·7	46·614
Tyne and Wear	63·9	56·6	57·732
West Midlands	58·1	55·1	56·202
West Yorkshire	61·3	57·9	59·058

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to the effect of cutbacks in British Rail's Freightliner system upon the traffic likely to be generated by the proposed Channel tunnel, in so far as that affects the viability of the project, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Decisions on the level of Freightliners services are a matter for commercial judgment by its board. Freightliners is keen to take full advantage of the opportunity offered by the Channel tunnel. Its plans will enable it to offer a comprehensive network of railborne container services through the tunnel and it is confident it will have sufficient capacity to handle the traffic generated by the opening of the tunnel.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of traffic generated by the proposed Channel tunnel is anticipated to terminate at Waterloo.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail estimates that about 70 per cent. of the passengers using its through Channel tunnel rail services will pass through the proposed Waterloo terminal.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether live animals for sale will be shipped as freight through the proposed Channel tunnel fixed link.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have been asked to reply.

The importation of live animals through the Channel tunnel is still under consideration but could only take place subject to stringent import controls, including quarantine arrangements being fully met.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether checks for rabies and other disease will be undertaken by Her Majesty's inspectors *(a)* before, *(b)* after or *(c)* at Ashford in traffic using the proposed Channel tunnel.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have been asked to reply.

Following preliminary discussions which have taken place with the concessionaires Eurotunnel, the Government will require that stringent import controls designed to protect our animal health status will be fully met and will be carried out either at Frethun in France or at Cheriton in this country.

The present rabies controls will apply to the tunnel. Checks for illegal importations of rabies-susceptible animals will be carried out at Frethun and the authorisation of Frethun (or Cheriton) as an approved port for the reception of licensed imports would depend on statutory requirements being fully met.

Roads

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for Transport which new road schemes will be added to the national road programme following the financing of a number of schemes in south-east England by the European Economic Community in accordance with the recently-announced plans approved by the European Ministers of Transport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am carrying out a review of the national road programme and aim to publish the results in the spring.

Buses

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of services run prior to 1 April 1986 have been registered for commercial operation under the Transport Act 1985; and what percentage of services run prior to 1 April 1986 are now covered under the tendering arrangements.

Mr. David Mitchell: Detailed figures are not available, but present indications are that 70 to 80 per cent. of bus mileage run prior to 1 April 1986 has been registered for commercial operation under the Transport Act 1985, and that most of the remainder is now run under subsidy contracts.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the bus lanes which run along Millbank to Parliament square; what recent assessment has been made of their impact on traffic flows; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The city of Westminster commissioned a study into the bus lanes in Millbank and Whitehall, which was completed in December 1986. I understand it will be considering the findings of the study shortly. It is for it as the highway authority to consider what future action to take.

Woolwich Free Ferry

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to reducing the hours of operation of the Woolwich free ferry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hours of operation are one of the matters being considered in the management review of the ferry.

Signposting

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each motorway in England a list of those tourist or historic attractions which are signposted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Tourist attractions currently signed from motorways in England are listed in the table. These include some signs erected before the introduction

of the new white on brown signs in April 1986. Negotiations are in hand with operators for signing a number of other large attractions from motorways. It is expected that many of these will be signed in time for the summer 1987 tourist season.

Motorway	*Tourist attractions signed*
M1	Sherwood Forest Woburn[1] Whipsnade[1] Alton Towers
A1(M)	Beamish Museum Historic Durham Knebworth House[1]
M4	Bowood House
M5	Cheddar Gorge and Caves Wookey Hole and Mill Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust
M6	Park-Hall Camelot Martin Mere Wildfowl Trust Alton Towers[1]
M25	Wisley Gardens[1]
M56	Chester Zoo[1]

[1] White on blue signs. All other attractions Listed have white on brown signs.

School Transport

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce a maximum age for driving buses and coaches used for school transport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I see no case for maximum ages for driving, unrelated to individual fitness. School buses are often driven by public service vehicle drivers, who are subject to annual medical examinations from the age of 65. All drivers are legally required to notify DVLC of disabilities when they occur and to provide a health declaration when they renew their ordinary licences, every three years from the age of 70.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require adult supervision of children on buses and coaches carrying children to and from school.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No; the supervision of schoolchildren on school buses is a matter for the local education authority in conjunction with the operator.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require school buses and coaches to have a special colour distinguishing them from other public transport vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. In the United Kingdom, buses are rarely used exclusively for the transport of schoolchildren. It would be impractical to insist on a specialised livery for vehicles used for schools services.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to make it compulsory for drivers of school buses and coaches to activate the four vehicle distress lights when halted for children to alight.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. Hazard warning lights are understood as indicating the presence of a temporary obstruction—often a vehicle that is broken down. They could distract attention from other hazards such as a child crossing the road.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to make it compulsory for school buses and coaches to be fitted with automatic door controls.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. There are already requirements for the safe control of power-operated doors. They apply to all public service vehicles.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has plans to increase the frequency of inspection of school buses and coaches as vehicles get older.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: School buses and coaches are subject to an annual test. I have no plans to inrease the frequency of inspections.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it mandatory for school buses to carry rear signplates conforming to sign A12 in the Vienna convention (1968), that is, a rectangular panel with black silhouettes of children on a yellow ground.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have no plans to make such a sign mandatory on buses owned by schools or otherwise used for school children. Bus and coach operators may use any type of "school bus" sign when carrying out schools services. School authorities are free to specify the use of such a sign if they so wish before letting a contract.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to make it mandatory for school buses and coaches to be fitted with safety belts on front-row seats.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We recently circulated for comment a proposal to mandate the fitting of seat belts to the front seats of all new large coaches and minibuses. This proposal was widely supported. It will be included in regulations to be made within the next few months.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce a maximum vehicle age for school buses and coaches.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. There is no maximum age prescribed for any type of vehicle but they have to pass an annual test. If a vehicle is found to be unfit, it is prohibited until the defects are cleared.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information does his Department hold on the adequacy of child passenger supervison on school buses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a matter for the local education authority in conjunction with the operator.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department has about maximum limits relating to age or mileage that other countries place on buses taking children to and from school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have no information on this. The EEC roadworthiness directive requires passenger vehicles with more than eight passenger seats to pass an annual test.

Public Transport (Speed Governors)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce compulsory speed governors on all new public transport vehicles over 10 tonnes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We will be consulting interested parties within the next few months on draft regulations which will require speed limiters to be fitted in due course to all coaches which are capable of exceeding the motorway speed limit.

Safety Helmets

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to make it mandatory for all motor cycle safety helmets to bear fluorescent and reflective markings.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. Placing adhesive stickers on, or painting, helmets can harm their protective quality. We advise motor cyclists to wear conspicuous clothing.

Motor Cycles

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* in rank order *(a)* the motor cycle casualties per million of the population and *(b)* the number of motor cycle casualties per 1000 vehicles for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will answer this question shortly.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to ban the importation of motor cycles with a power exceeding 75 kW.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require riders of motor cycles having a cylinder capacity of more than 350 cc to submit themselves to a special medical examination every two years for the renewal of their licences.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. There is no evidence to suggest that medical condition constitutes a significant factor in motor cycle accidents, any more than it does in accidents generally. Such a requirement offers no obvious road safety benefits.

Drivers (Speed Limits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce speed limits for beginner drivers who have passed their driving test.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. The evidence from those countries where such restrictions are in force does not suggest that they produce a clear road safety benefit.

Child Safety

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information is available to his Department about the relative risk of death or serious injury to children in car crashes when the child is not wearing a suitable restraint and is seated *(a)* in the front of the car and *(b)* in the back.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Various studies have shown that an unrestrained child is safer in the rear than in the front of a car. Relative accident rates are not available from United Kingdom national statistics. An unrestrained child is much more likely to be injured or killed in an accident than a restrained child.

Information on child restraints is available through the Department's freephone road safety information service 0800 234 888. I strongly advice parents to fit and use child restraints.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department takes to prevent the use of ineffective or unsafe safety devices for children in cars.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our regulations require child restraints used in cars to be approved to the appropriate British standards or United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regulations. These standards are kept under review and amended as necessary to increase the safety of child restraints.

Car Telephones

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received regarding the use of hand-held car telephones whilst driving;

(2) what plans he has to introduce a safety code for the use of car telephones; and if he will incorporate such a code in any revised edition of the highway code;

(3) whether he has received a copy of the mobile communications police and motoring organisations safety code of practice for the use of car phones; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The revised highway code to be published shortly contains new advice on the use of microphones and car telephones. This advice is:

"Do not use a hand-held microphone or telephone handset while your vehicle is moving, except in an emergency. You should only speak into a fixed, neckslung, or clipped on microphone when it would not distract your attention from the road. Do not stop on the hard shoulder of a motorway to answer or make a call, however urgent."

As part of the consultation on the proposed amendments to the highway code, some 30 organisations commented on the subject of car telephones. All the comments were taken into account in preparing the new advice.

British Telecom Mobile Communications is currently considering with various interested parties a safety code for the use of its car telephones which amplifies the new highway code advice.

Taxi Drivers (U Turns)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations govern the making by London taxi drivers of U-turns on main roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Unless prohibited by a traffic regulation order, this manoeuvre may be carried out anywhere provided that it is safe to do so. London-type taxis are specially constructed so as to be able to execute this kind of turn.

London Regional Transport (Vehicle Imports)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Transport what directives or requests he has made to the London London Regional Transport in respect of import of vehicles for its services and those of its contractors.

Mr. David Mitchell: Like other nationalised industries, London Regional Transport is expected to follow the Government's purchasing policy, which encourages them to buy British goods provided that the products and prices are right. It is up to the management of LRT to apply these principles to individual purchasing decisions but I am pleased to say that the vast majority of LRT's vehicles are British-made.

Traffic Lights, Greater London

Mr. Ground asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps the London residuary body is taking to restore to working order the traffic lights at the crossroads formed by Wellington road south and Hanworth road, Hounslow, which have been out of action for more than two days; what reason has been given for the delay in repairing the lights and for the absence of manual controls in the meantime; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what procedures have been laid down for providing manual control of traffic when traffic lights at busy crossroads in Greater London are out of action.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The present procedures aim to get malfunctioning traffic lights back into commission as quickly as possible. I understand that the contractors took the required steps the same day to restore the lights at this crossroads. A major unit had to be replaced and the effect on the equipment of the snow and freezing conditions meant it did not operate satisfactorily until 14 January. Manual control in the event of traffic lights failure is used only at the busiest junctions at peak times given manpower considerations. As is usual, warning signs were placed on the approaches to this particular crossroads to advise that the signals were out of action.

M20 (Ashford-Hollingbourne)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total amount of money that has now been spent on design work, administration and construction of the Ashford-Hollingbourne section of the M20.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The costs to date are as follows:

	£
Design work	2,887,000
Surveys and Testing	417,000
Advance construction of two bridges	2,296,000
Other expenses	17,000
	£5,617,000

Staff and other costs in the period up to 1980 when detailed design was undertaken by the Department's Kent sub-unit are not available.

It is not practicable to estimate the Department's administrative costs.

Motorway Fog Detectors

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will install on the M1 at its junction with the M6 Marconi MET-3 fog detectors for a period of evaluation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no present plans to install fog detection equipment on the M1 motorway. As announced on 29 October, trials of differing designs of equipment will be carried out elsewhere over this winter and next winter to decide which design best meets the Department's requirements. The new system will then be installed at the 30 fog-prone sites on the M25 identified by the Metrological Office. The work is due for completion in 1990. The effectiveness of the system will be monitored to determine whether it should be used on other motorways.

British Rail (Services)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has received from British Rail about its level of services during the current exceptional weather, and as to its plans for coping with similar conditions in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail has supplied me with frequent information about the effect of this week's abnormally severe weather on its services. I shall, of course, want to consider with the board whether there are any particular lessons to be learnt for the future, but these extremely low temperatures occur very rarely and the board should incur expenditure only if it can be shown to be cost-effective.

Road Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorists were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in driving accidents in (i) England and (ii) the county of Avon in each of the following years 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986, respectively.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will answer this question shortly.

Bus Deregulation

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress to date on bus deregulation in Avon.

Mr. David Mitchell: Bus service levels have been broadly maintained in Avon, and the county council has made a saving of some £1 million in its annual subsidy bill. The inevitable initial teething troubles are now being resolved, and there are substantial numbers of minibuses operating in Bristol, Bath and Weston-Super-Mare. The Government were able to approve the sale of Badgerline, formerly a subsidiary of the National Bus Company, to its own management last September.

Freight (Statistics)

Mr. Leadbitter asked the Secretary of State for Transport what were the returns in volume and value of freight carried for each of the years 1981 to 1985 and the numbers employed in the Freightliner service for those years; and if he will estimate future trends.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information for the years 1981 to 1985 is as follows:

	1981	1982	1983	1984-85	1985-86
Volume of freight carried [1](TEU's) 000's	824	766	975	852	886
Revenue (£ million)	72·1	69·6	97·6	101·7	107·0
Staff employed at year's end	2,215	2,087	2,028	1,907	1,844

[1] Containers forwarded by land in 20 foot equivalent units (TEU's).

Future trends in the business are a matter of commercial judgment for the Freightliners board.

Roads (Maintenance)

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the arrangements for technical supervision on continuous and periodic bases of a highway maintenance arrangement under section 42 of the Highways Act 1980 when a non-metropolitan district council exercises its option to undertake the maintenance of its unclassified roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. Day-to-day supervision of works is the responsibility of the district council. The county council is responsible for approving the district council's detailed estimates, and may withhold payment until it is satisfied that the works are properly executed.

The Audit Commission is currently undertaking a special study into highway maintenance which includes agency arrangements between county and district councils.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* for each authority in England (i) their bid for capital allocation and transport supplementary grant for 1987-88, (ii) the allocation announced in each case and (iii) the allocation as a percentage of the bid in each case.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information for the 108 local highway authorities eligible to receive transport supplementary grant in 1987-88 is as follows:

Transport capital allocation 1987-88[1]

Authority	(i) Bid £ million	(ii) Allocation[2] £ million	(iii) Allocation as percentage of bid[3]
City of London	1·955	1·320	67·5
Barking and Dagenham	5·622	2·590	46·1
Barnet	2·370	1·290	54·4
Bexley	3·023	1·520	50·3
Brent	1·918	1·120	58·4
Bromley	3·199	1·710	53·5
Camden	5·074	1·060	20·9
Croydon	2·207	1·180	53·5
Ealing	9·888	5·070	51·3
Enfield	16·027	15·100	94·2
Greenwich	6·003	5·160	86·0
Hackney	7·200	1·380	19·2
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·468	0·360	76·9
Haringey	4·898	3·400	69·4
Harrow	6·195	4·130	66·7
Havering	4·423	3·510	79·4
Hillingdon	13·045	7·250	55·6
Hounslow	2·911	1·960	67·3
Islington	1·616	0·800	49·5
Kensington and Chelsea	0·918	0·710	77·3
Kingston upon Thames	12·214	9·770	80·0
Lambeth	2·933	1·140	38·9
Lewisham	3·905	1·740	44·6
Merton	13·114	7·780	59·3
Newham	7·976	3·430	43·0
Redbridge	4·867	2·800	57·5
Richmond upon Thames	1·623	0·920	56·7
Southwark	5·213	2·970	57·0
Sutton	3·756	2·180	58·0
Tower Hamlets	1·730	0·850	49·1
Waltham Forest	3·327	2·570	77·2
Wandsworth	10·617	6·830	64·3
Westminster	6·458	2·360	36·5
Bolton	5·693	4·440	78·0
Bury	1·810	1·050	58·0
Manchester	14·836	5·900	39·8
Oldham	5·487	1·260	23·0
Rochdale	3·380	0·930	27·5
Salford	8·101	6·880	84·9
Stockport	1·761	1·140	64·7
Tameside	2·159	0·820	38·0
Trafford	5·068	3·390	66·9
Wigan	4·365	3·630	83·2
Knowsley	1·450	0·530	36·6
Liverpool	12·084	5·630	46·6
St. Helens	1·330	0·550	41·4
Sefton	3·071	1·060	34·5
Wirral	2·405	1·200	49·9
Barnsley	4·377	1·650	37·7
Doncaster	2·615	0·980	37·5
Rotherham	2·828	1·290	45·6
Sheffield	13·442	5·560	41·4
Gateshead	3·030	2·150	71·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	10·761	4·330	40·2
North Tyneside	1·810	1·390	76·0
South Tyneside	4·620	2·440	52·8
Sunderland	6·890	2·750	39·9
Birmingham	22·811	9·980	43·8
Coventry	6·777	4·100	60·5
Dudley	4·434	2·290	51·6
Sandwell	5·382	2·440	45·3
Solihull	1·438	0·810	56·3
Walsall	5·103	3·690	72·3
Wolverhampton	9·956	6·190	62·2
Bradford	13·493	10·150	75·2
Calderdale	3·015	0·600	19·9
Kirklees	5·230	2·240	42·8
Leeds	6·982	2·620	37·5
Wakefield	5·108	0·930	18·2
Avon	7·366	6·560	89·1
Bedfordshire	7·280	6·510	89·4
Berkshire	20·528	8·690	42·3
Buckinghamshire	5·257	4·570	86·9
Cambridgeshire	11·052	10·030	90·8
Cheshire	11·970	6·050	50·5
Cleveland	10·710	7·040	65·7
Cornwall	10·391	4·920	47·3
Cumbria	3·340	2·247	67·3
Derbyshire	7·500	4·935	65·8
Devon	22·533	8·482	37·6
Dorset	18·700	13·550	72·5
Durham	7·655	6·080	79·4
East Sussex	8·825	4·868	55·2
Essex	28·325	18·794	66·4
Gloucestershire	7·070	2·510	35·5

Authority	(i) Bid £ million	(ii) Allocation[2] £ million	(iii) Allocation as percentage of bid[2]
Hampshire	20·659	13·405	64·9
Hereford and Worcester	9·478	6·024	63·6
Hertfordshire	12·613	8·820	69·9
Humberside	10·500	6·320	60·2
Isle of Wight	3·346	1·900	56·8
Kent	33·631	18·200	54·1
Lancashire	25·724	16·534	64·3
Leicestershire	16·698	11·176	66·9
Lincolnshire	6·284	4·725	75·2
Norfolk	8·995	5·060	56·3
Northamptonshire	18·951	12·000	63·3
Northumberland	4·252	2·662	62·6
North Yorkshire	12·815	8·870	69·2
Nottinghamshire	11·496	5·710	49·7
Oxfordshire	14·302	4·560	31·9
Shropshire	5·821	3·990	68·5
Somerset	6·726	3·280	48·8
Staffordshire	15·210	9·210	60·6
Suffolk	8·400	4·410	52·5
Surrey	20·199	8·260	40·9
Warwickshire	7·279	3·920	53·9
West Sussex	10·169	7·200	70·8
Wiltshire	9·815	4·078	41·5

[1] Transport capital allocations for 1987-88 covering roads for all highway authorities and public transport for shire counties.

[2] For London, allocations include Boroughs' shares of expenditure on Urban Traffic Control managed by the London Residuary Body on behalf of the Secretary of State which is excluded from Boroughs' bids.

TABLE 3

Intentions for Transport Supplementary Grant 1987-88[1]

Authority	(i) Bid	(ii) Accepted expenditure[1]	(iii) Accepted expenditure as percentage of bid[1]
City of London	1·143	0·958	83·8
Barking and Dagenham	2·801	1·600	57·1
Barnet	0·855	0·950	111·1
Bexley	1·870	0·902	48·2
Brent	1·115	0·622	55·8
Bromley	1·255	0·858	68·4
Camden	0·960	0·214	22·3
Croydon	0·450	0·404	89·8
Ealing	5·502	3·822	69·5
Enfield	14·660	14·826	101·1
Greenwich	5·840	3·960	67·8
Hackney	1·249	0·400	32·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·388	0·236	60·8
Haringey	3·758	2·956	78·7
Harrow	3·695	3·218	87·1
Havering	3·878	2·568	66·2
Hillingdon	9·174	4·842	52·8
Hounslow	2·125	1·246	58·6
Islington	0·535	0·206	38·5
Kensington and Chelsea	0·717	0·522	72·8
Kingston upon Thames	10·319	9·474	91·8
Lambeth	1·973	0·576	29·2
Lewisham	1·364	0·598	43·8
Merton	12·400	5·438	43·9
Newham	3·881	2·328	60·0
Redbridge	2·907	2·096	72·1
Richmond upon Thames	0·809	0·410	50·7
Southwark	3·022	1·468	48·6
Sutton	2·882	1·686	58·5
Tower Hamlets	0·970	0·338	34·8
Waltham Forest	1·810	2·182	120·6
Wandsworth	7·445	4·884	65·6
Westminster	2·747	0·766	27·9

Authority	(i) Bid	(ii) Accepted expenditure[2]	(iii) Accepted expenditure as percentage of bid[2]
Bolton	4·250	4·100	96·5
Bury	1·214	0·664	54·7
Manchester	9·134	4·550	49·8
Oldham	1·253	0·540	43·1
Rochdale	0·818	0·500	61·1
Salford	7·101	6·602	93·0
Stockport	1·752	0·568	32·4
Tameside	0·829	0·494	59·6
Trafford	3·015	2·892	95·9
Wigan	3·365	3·300	98·1
Knowsley	0·598	0·286	47·8
Liverpool	6·370	4·534	71·2
St. Helens	0·610	0·300	49·2
Sefton	1·740	0·414	23·8
Wirral	0·995	0·754	75·8
Barnsley	1·848	0·946	51·2
Doncaster	0·485	0·452	93·2
Rotherham	1·294	0·334	25·8
Sheffield	7·932	4·210	53·1
Gateshead	1·688	1·600	94·8
Newcastle upon Tyne	6·556	3·430	52·3
North Tyneside	0·893	0·842	94·3
South Tyneside	3·190	1·940	60·8
Sunderland	5·148	2·200	42·7
Birmingham	13·884	7·826	56·4
Coventry	4·946	3·252	65·8
Dudley	3·494	1·288	36·9
Sandwell	4·511	1·190	26·4
Solihull	0·690	0·550	79·7
Walsall	4·620	2·740	59·3
Wolverhampton	8·080	5·688	70·4
Bradford	11·047	9·158	82·9
Calderdale	0·666	0·240	36·0
Kirklees	2·204	1·546	70·1
Leeds	3·066	1·106	36·1
Wakefield	2·636	0·360	13·7
Avon	5·675	3·946	69·5
Bedfordshire	6·522	5·232	80·2
Berkshire	9·876	6·204	62·8
Buckinghamshire	4·181	4·070	97·3
Cambridgeshire	9·764	8·948	91·6
Cheshire	5·230	3·810	72·8
Cleveland	9·175	4·422	48·2
Cornwall	6·855	2·976	43·4
Cumbria	2·605	1·550	59·5
Derbyshire	2·797	1·496	53·5
Devon	13·158	6·370	48·4
Dorset	17·460	10·754	61·6
Durham	6·915	4·818	69·7
East Sussex	2·415	1·928	79·8
Essex	21·589	16·100	74·6
Gloucestershire	3·817	1·884	49·4
Hampshire	13·512	8·496	62·9
Hereford and Worcester	6·387	3·380	52·9
Hertfordshire	10·350	3·600	34·8
Humberside	6·372	3·934	61·7
Isle of Wight	2·744	1·766	64·4
Kent	23·187	11·626	50·1
Lancashire	19·422	12·750	65·6
Leicestershire	13·868	8·850	63·8
Lincolnshire	4·228	3·500	82·8
Norfolk	6·180	4·310	69·7
Northamptonshire	17·598	8·714	49·5
Northumberland	2·954	2·150	72·8
North Yorkshire	8·531	7·104	83·3
Nottinghamshire	5·798	3·700	63·8
Oxfordshire	7·377	1·602	21·7
Shropshire	4·018	2·588	64·4
Somerset	3·896	2·574	66·1
Staffordshire	11·764	6·030	51·3
Suffolk	4·959	1·798	36·3

Authority	(i) Bid	(ii) Accepted expenditure[1]	(iii) Accepted expenditure as percentage of bid
Surrey	10·762	6·116	56·8
Warwickshire	4·998	2·918	58·4
West Sussex	8·160	6·178	75·7
Wiltshire	4·511	2·858	63·4

[1] Transport Supplementary Grant will be maintained at a rate of 50 per cent. of accepted expenditure.
[2] For London, accepted expenditure for Transport Supplementary Grant includes Boroughs' shares of expenditure on Urban Traffic Control managed by the London Residuary Body on behalf of the Secretary of State which is excluded from Boroughs' bids.

SCOTLAND

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make available maps, showing the full extent of sites scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, to local authorities involved in any planning or building applications on areas identified as scheduled sites.

Mr. Ancram: Local authorities already have access to this information. For monuments scheduled before 1983, a complete list of monuments is given in the booklet "List of Ancient Monuments in Scotland", published by HMSO in 1983, which includes map references. For subsequent scheduling, the local authority in whose area a site is situated is provided with full details, including maps.

Any authority in doubt about the status of a given site can, of course, also consult my Department's Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate.

Archaeological Sites

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will issue guidance to local authorities advising them of the importance of updating the lists of all archaeological sites in their area.

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for surveying and recording archaeological sites lies with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Lists issued by or through the Commission are made available to local authorities, but it is for the local authorities to decide whether they should themselves maintain records of sites in their areas.

"Children's Play in Scotland"

Mr. McCartney asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will respond to recommendation 4 of the policy statement, "Children's Play in Scotland", published by the Scottish Community Education Council in spring 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: I hope to be in a position to do so soon.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1986 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down to the individual institutions but comprising their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

	1986	Percentage change since 1985
National Galleries of Scotland	529,675	−1·5
National Museums of Scotland	466,816	−34·2

The National Galleries of Scotland comprise the National Gallery of Scotland, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The National Museums of Scotland comprise the Royal Museum of Scotland buildings at Chambers street and Queen street, Edinburgh, the Scottish Agricultural Museum, the Scottish United Services Museum, the Museum of Flight and the Shambellie Museum of Costume.

The Chambers street building of the Royal Museum of Scotland was closed from July to early October 1986 to allow roof repairs to be undertaken. Refurbishment was also undertaken at the National Portrait Gallery during 1986, causing a drop in attendances. Attendances at the National Gallery of Scotland and the Gallery of Modern Art were higher than in 1985.

Signposting

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report*, for each motorway in Scotland, a list of those tourist or historic attractions which are signposted.

Mr. Ancram: Scone Palace in Tayside region is signposted from the M85 and M90, and Bannockburn heritage centre in Central region is signposted from the M80 and M9.

Mental Illness

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number of beds for the treatment of mental illness in Scotland in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1982 and *(c)* the latest available year for (i) general hospitals (ii) mental hospitals and (iii) other residential facilities.

Mr. John MacKay: The average number of available staffed beds classified for mental illness and geriatric, child and adolescent psychiatry in general hospitals, in mental hospitals and in all other NHS hospitals in Scotland in 1971, 1982 and 1986 is as follows. Figures for 1972 are not readily available.

	Six months to 31 March 1971	Year Ending 30 September 1982	Year Ending 31 March 1986
General Hospitals	468	441	781
Mental Hospitals	19,096	15,945	14,935
Other Hospitals	117	257	486
Total	19,681	16,643	16,202

In addition, in 1986, 68 registered nursing homes admitted some mentally ill patients but had no beds specifically classified for that purpose.

Health Services

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give *(a)* the total gross expenditure on the National Health Service, *(b)* capital expenditure on hospitals and community health services for each year since 1974-75 in cash terms and adjusted by (i) the gross domestic product deflator, (ii) the National Health Service pay and prices index and (iii) taking account of demographic factors, with special regard to the needs of the elderly.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Total gross NHS expenditure

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator*	*Adjusted by the NHS pay and price index*
1974-75	453	1,532	1,666
1975-76	596	1,604	1,708
1976-77	676	1,607	1,715
1977-78	768	1,603	1,779
1978-79	882	1,664	1,842
1979-80	1,053	1,700	1,838
1980-81	1,330	1,810	1,827
1981-82	1,519	1,881	1,916
1982-83	1,648	1,903	1,933
1983-84	1,758	1,943	1,964
1984-85	1,885	1,998	1,989
1985-86	1,997	1,997	1,997

Hospitals and community health services: gross capital expenditure

	£ million cash	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator*	*Adjusted by the NHS pay and price index*
1974-75	30	101	99
1975-76	39	105	99
1976-77	37	88	84
1977-78	38	79	75
1978-79	51	96	90
1979-80	58	94	85
1980-81	59	80	69
1981-82	84	104	73
1982-83	92	106	102
1983-84	99	109	108
1984-85	106	112	112
1985-86	120	120	120

Note: Separate NHS pay and price factors are not available for Scotland. The factors used are those maintained by DHSS for England.

Information is not available about the cost to the NHS programme as a whole of meeting demand from demographic change. Average growth of demand on hospital and community health services caused by demographic factors over the period since 1974-75 is assessed at about 0·5 per cent. per annum.

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will update the information on prescription charges and the cost of pharmaceuticals given on 12 November 1985, *Official Report*, columns *743-4*, by giving figures for subsequent years up to the most recent available date.

Mr. John MacKay: The information available on NHS prescriptions dispensed by chemist contractors and appliance suppliers in Scotland in the period July 1985—September 1986 is given in the table:

	1985			*1986*	
	July—September	*October—December*	*January—March*	*April—June*	*July—September*
			Million		
Prescriptions Dispensed	8·69	9·50	9·05	9·16	9·04
			Percentage		
Percentage exempt from prescription charges	80	81	81	82	82
			£ million		
Total Gross cost	44·04	49·62	46·78	48·78	49·11
Less: Prescription charges paid by patients	3·42	3·66	3·50	3·71	3·67
Total net cost	40·62	45·96	43·28	45·07	45·44
			£		
Average Gross Cost per prescription	5·07	5·22	5·17	5·33	5·43

Prepayment certificates sold in Scotland in the financial year 1985-86 were as follows:

Number of certificates issued	*Thousands*
4 monthly	29
Annual	38
	£ million
Total income from sale of certificates	1·48

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether ambulance staff have participated in the exercise of the local emergency plan at each of Dounreay, Torness and Hunterston; and, in each case where units were involved, if he will list which ones participated;

(2) what training has been given to ambulance staff to deal with a major accident at Dounreay, Hunterston, and Torness, respectively;

(3) if he will list for Dounreay, Hunterston and Torness what studies have been done on the problems of

evacuating all low mobility groups in the event of a worst case atomic accident; and if he will also list for each study the geographical area covered;

(4) if he will list what specialist equipment, including personal dosimeters, radiac survey meters and decontamination meters are available for ambulance staff at Dounreay, Torness and Hunterston, respectively; and in each case what training staff have received.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Granton Gasworks, Edinburgh

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the proposed closure of Granton gasworks, Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations. The commercial operation of Granton gasworks is a matter for British Gas plc. I understand that a decision has been taken to close the plant with effect from February 1987. Discussions are currently being held with the 80 employees likely to be affected. I understand that British Gas plc has undertaken to redeploy those who wish to remain in employment.

Student Grants

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing the maintenance element of student grants in 1985-86.

Mr. John MacKay: In the students' allowances scheme, which is administered by the Scottish Education Department and is broadly comparable with the scheme of mandatory support for English — Welsh students, maintenance allowances (including reimbursement of travelling expenses) totalling £66·66 million have been paid to Scottish students for the academic session 1985-86.

Students' maintenance allowances in that year were:

	£
Students living in the parental home	1,365
Elsewhere (other than in London)	1,775
Elsewhere (in London)	2,110

Subject to reductions according to the income of parents, spouses or the students themselves. Travelling expenses in excess of £50, if necessarily incurred in connection with study, were also reimbursed.

Dundee

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number and percentage of people employed in manufacturing services, construction and primary industries in each district ward in Dundee at the 1981 census; and what subsequent comparative information on such district wards he possesses.

Mr. Lang: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

United States (Trade Policies)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet his American counterparts to discuss the United States administration's policies on trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend plans to visit the United States and meet his counterparts within the next few months.

Film Releasing Experiment

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has yet completed his review of the Manchester and Glasgow film releasing experiment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: No. I have not yet received the Director General of Fair Trading's assessment of the Manchester and Glasgow film releasing experiment.

Copying and Counterfeiting

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases have been taken up with national authorities of copying and couterfeiting of British goods sold in overseas markets.

Mr. Pattie: The Government have made and continue to make representations to the authorities in countries where counterfeiting and other infringements of intellectual property rights are a general problem. However, action in individual cases is normally the responsibility of the owners of the rights being infringed to pursue. My Department aims to be kept informed about progress in such cases, and is currently in contact with several firms whose products are being counterfeited abroad, with their representative bodies, and with relevant diplomatic posts. Our posts are under instructions to give assistance, and to report cases of piracy and counterfeiting of British goods which come to their attention. Representations may be made as appropriate, and this has been done twice in the last six months.

Departmental Expenditure (Wales)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total expenditure of his Department which is incurred in Wales for the current financial year and the most recent for which complete information is available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Trade Statistics

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest figures on the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Mr. Alan Clark: On an overseas trade statistics basis, the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and the United States of America for the period January to November 1986 is in surplus by £1,779 million.

United States (Trade Tariff)

Dr. Hampson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when he intends to meet the United States special trade representative; and what position he will take on the 200 per cent. tariff increase on gin proposed by the United States Government;

(2) what estimate he has made of the impact on profitability and jobs in the gin industry of the proposed 200 per cent. increase on gin imports into the United States of America.

Mr. Alan Clark: Negotiations continue in an attempt to settle the Community's outstanding dispute with the United States over the trade consequences of Spanish and Portuguese accession. The Community has made it clear that it will respond in kind to disproportionate retaliation of the sort announced by the United States on 30 December against a range of exports, including gin. We estimate that a 200 per cent. tariff would have the effect of effectively eliminating sales of British-bottled gin from the United States market (current sales: £52 million). The impact on profitability and employment in the United Kingdom must depend on the length of time that such a measure would be in force. We hope that implementation can be avoided, and continue in our efforts to promote a mutually satisfactory negotiated solution.

Pilkington plc

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the Office of Fair Trading to complete its consideration of the BTR bid for Pilkington.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987]: It was announced on 15 January that my right hon. Friend had decided not to refer this proposed takeover to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. His decision was in accordance with the recommendation of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his time schedule for reviewing the assisted areas of England and Wales; and if he will publish his decisions.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1987]: The review of the administrative arrangements and effectiveness of the regional policy established in 1984 has been completed. I hope to announce decisions shortly.

Regional Aid

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing at 1986 prices the value of regional aid grants paid to each region, Scotland and Wales from 1978-79 onwards.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January]: The question has been interpreted to refer to regional development grants. The information requested is as follows.

[1]*£ million*

Area	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	[2]*1986-87*
North East	236·7	176·1	140·2	138·7	107·7	77·6	66·6	47·2	67·6
North West	147·2	122·0	169·5	224·4	156·8	130·3	116·1	84·4	84·7
Yorkshire & Humberside	58·0	35·4	53·7	59·5	42·8	26·5	28·9	24·6	20·3
East Midlands	4·4	3·9	4·4	9·1	10·3	9·2	4·2	4·4	7·1
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South West	11·5	8·2	11·8	13·0	12·9	8·8	10·3	8·8	12·1
Scotland	206·5	115·5	157·1	180·4	338·4	161·3	118·1	109·4	133·8
Wales	137·5	83·4	143·5	154·4	143·1	81·4	100·2	85·9	70·8
Great Britain Total	801·8	544·5	680·2	779·5	812·0	495·1	444·4	364·7	396·4

[1] Expenditure on a 1986 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.
[2] 1986-87 data is provisional and for the first three quarters of the year only.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing at 1986 prices the value of regional selective aid paid to each region, Scotland and Wales from 1978-79 onwards.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January]: The information requested is as follows:

[1]*£ million*

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	[2]*1986-87*
North East	17·9	17·8	19·6	26·1	23·3	15·5	15·6	15·7	11·0
North West	79·8	39·5	28·9	21·0	23·1	17·1	15·6	13·5	10·6
Yorkshire & Humberside	10·0	11·1	9·2	8·7	12·2	9·5	10·3	7·8	6·2
East Midlands	1·3	1·5	1·0	1·3	4·9	9·9	6·9	4·0	1·2
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4·9	6·0
South West	4·7	4·4	3·5	2·1	3·0	2·2	2·0	2·3	1·0
Scotland	23·8	24·7	30·8	24·5	23·2	26·8	34·6	48·9	21·0

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	[2]1986-87
Wales	58·5	30·9	14·8	11·6	17·0	17·3	20·7	22·9	18·5
Great Britain Total	196·0	129·9	107·8	95·3	106·7	98·3	105·7	120·0	75·5

[1] Expenditure on a 1986 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.
[2] 1986-87 data is provisional and for the first three quarters of the year only.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bail Applications

Mr. Bell asked the Attorney-General what was the number of bail applications which were refused for those charged with scheduled offences during the years 1983, 1984 and 1985; how many bail applications for scheduled offences have been granted for the same years; and how many of those granted bail did not comply with its conditions during the same years.

The Attorney-General: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Legal Aid

Mr. Silvester asked the Attorney-General how many certificates he has issued in respect of United Kingdom citizens under rule 3 of the legal aid addendum to the rules of procedure of the European Commission of Human Rights.

Mr. Lyell: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics for cases involving the European Commission of Human Rights are not maintained separately. During the 12 months ending 13 January 1987, a total of 134 certificates were issued in respect of United Kingdom citizens involved in civil proceedings outside the United Kingdom and this figure would include any cases involving the European Commission. It is estimated that any European Commission cases will be in single figures.

ENERGY

British Coal

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on British Coal's external financing limit for 1986-87.

Mr. David Hunt: British Coal's EFL for 1986-87 is to be increased by £95 million to £825 million. Despite vigorous action to save costs, it has not been possible to contain the impact of the weakening in the energy market and of the generally mild weather of recent months. The increase is being charged to the reserve and is within the estimate for the planning total in the public expenditure White Paper. It remains British Coal's objective to break-even by 1988-89.

Gas and Electricity (Charges)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the cost of abolishing standing charges for gas and electricity for *(a)* all households and *(b)* pensioner households only, giving for each (i) an estimate of the gross annual cost, and (ii) an estimate of the cost net of any savings in social security payments.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Abolition of standing charges for all gas and electricity consumers would cost each of the industries concerned some £550 million a year in lost revenue. Abolition for pensioner households alone would cost both industries about £300 million a year in total.

The revenue so lost would have to be recovered through increased unit prices. Any effect on social security payments would be negligible. Moreover, the increased unit prices would penalise those with large heating needs, many of whom are elderly and among the least well-off.

Mr. Leadbitter asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board and British Gas to consider schemes of assistance to old people who are at risk during periods of excessively cold weather.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My Department has been kept in touch with the schemes of assistance and other measures which the electricity and gas industries take to assist the elderly and others in need. These include easy payment schemes, the code of practice safeguards on disconnection, advice on insulation, and other measures in order to help ensure warmth in cold weather.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether ambulance staff have participated in the exercise of the local emergency plan at Chapel Cross, Sellafield, Wylfa, Trawsfyndd, Oldbury, Berkeley, Hinkley Point, Winfrith, Dungerness, Bradwell and Sizewell; and, in each case where units were involved, if he will list which ones participated.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list for each of the following power stations what studies have been made of the problems of evacuating all low mobility groups in the event of a worst case atomic accident at each of Chapel Cross, Sellafield, Wylfa, Trawsfyndd, Oldbury, Berkeley, Hinkley Point, Winfrith, Dungeness, Bradwell, Sizewell and Hartlepool; and if he will also list for each study the geographical area covered;

(2) what specialist equipment, including personal dosimeters, radiac survey meters and decontamination meters are available for ambulance staff at Chapel Cross, Sellafield, Wylfa, Trawsfyndd, Oldbury, Berkeley, Hinkley Point, Winfrith, Dungeness, Bradwell and Sizewell, respectively; and in each case what training staff have received;

(3) what training has been given to ambulance staff to deal with a major accident at each of the following nuclear installations: Chapel Cross, Sellafield, Wylfa, Trawsfyndd, Oldbury, Berkeley, Hinkley Point, Winfrith, Dungeness, Bradwell, Sizewell and Hartlepool.

Mr. Goodlad: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on

19 December, *Official Report*, column *764*, how many nuclear installation inspectorate inspectors have been engaged full time on each review at all times since March 1983; what other duties have been undertaken by inspectors working on these reviews; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *764*, when he expects the reviews of Calder Hall and Chapel Cross to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Gas and Electricity (Disconnection)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will introduce legislation to oblige gas and electricity suppliers to desist from disconnecting households with elderly people or young children during winter months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Gas and Electricity industries operate a code of practice on disconnection, which is monitored by their consumers' councils. The code is designed to safeguard households which contain young children or pensioners, and provides that no pensioner household will be disconnected between 1 October and 31 March. I believe these measures operate satisfactorily.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will introduce legislation to require gas and electricity suppliers not to disconnect supplies to domestic households unless the occupier has been given prior written notice giving reasonable notice of disconnection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him today. The industries' procedures provide for adequate written notice where disconnection is being considered.

Power Stations

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy on what date consent was given for Heysham II; whether alternative siting costs had been considered before consent was given; whether the Central Electricity Generating Board had made available to his Department *(a)* statements of capital costs for alternative sites, *(b)* calculations of net effective costs for alternative sites, *(c)* a detailed comparison of system or benefits and operational factors for alternative sites or *(d)* a detailed statement of projected future development of the electricity system in the medium term; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his questions on 12 December 1986 at columns 244-5. The date of the original consent referring to the Heysham site under section 2 of the Electric Lighting Act 1909, as subsequently amended, was 29 October 1969.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a list showing, for each existing consent under section 2 of the Electric Lighting Act 1909, as subsequently amended, where construction has not yet started *(a)* the name of the site, *(b)* the type and capacity of station for which consent exists, *(c)* when consent was given, *(d)* whether planning permission has also been granted, or has been deemed to have been granted, *(e)* the earliest date on which either consent or planning permission expires, *(f)* whether alternative siting costs were considered before consent was given and *(g)* whether a public inquiry was held before consent was given; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested as soon as possible.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many nuclear reactors were not providing power to the grid on 15 January, and why.

Mr. Goodlad: This is a matter for the CEGB, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom are currently not contributing electricity to the grid; and for what reasons.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Energy Committee (Departmental Memorandum)

Sir Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in the *Official Report* an updated version of the information provided in his Department's memorandum to the Energy Committee, published in HC (1985-86) 196-i, so far as the statistics contained in paragraphs 10.1 and 10.2 and relating to the coal firing scheme are concerned.

Mr. David Hunt: The Department of Energy's memorandum to the Energy Committee relating to the coal firing scheme can be updated as follows.

"*The Coal Firing Scheme*

10.1 The Secretary of State for Energy announced on the 22 November 1985 that the Government's Coal Firing Scheme will remain open for applications until 30 June 1987. The ceiling of £75 million on the amount of grant that could be paid was lifted. The scheme gives practical expression to the Government's commitment to the coal industry by providing grant aid in respect of the higher capital cost associated with conversion to coal firing. Companies eligible for Coal Firing Grant may also apply for a loan from the European Coal and Steel Community whose terms are well suited to projects with high initial capital costs.

10.2 At the end of December 1986 there were over 475 active coal firing projects including nearly 420 where the project is already underway and 13 where grant has been offered but not yet accepted. Total annual coalburn for all projects which have been offered grant is £2·7 million tonnes; £50 million has been offered grants and a further £1-4 million grant could result from projects still under consideration."

EMPLOYMENT

New Workers Scheme

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Paymaster General how many applications have been received from employers within the Hereford and Leominster travel-to-work area and the Ross and Andaford travel-to-work area in respect of the new workers scheme; and how many people have been employed on this basis in those areas.

Mr. Lee: Statistics are not available under the new workers scheme for travel-to-work areas. However, in the Shropshire, Hereford and Worcester area (which includes

Hereford, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye) 1,037 new workers scheme applications have been received and 954 young people are currently in jobs supported under the Scheme. In addition, in the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire area, which includes Cinderford, 690 applications have been received and 661 young people are currently in jobs supported under the scheme.

Training Costs

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate by how much the income maintenance costs of the employment and training measures listed in the letter from the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) to the hon. Member for Kensington, dated 5 June 1986, would be reduced in 1986-87, assuming deductions in the allowances payable of *(a)* £10 per single person aged 16 years and over and £10 per dependent spouse and *(b)* £23 per single person aged 16 years and over and £23 per dependent spouse but with no changes to payments under the community programme or the job release scheme.

Mr. Lee: It is not possible to estimate the effect of these assumed deductions in allowances for 1986-87. The total cost of allowances paid during this period will not be known until after the end of the financial year. Using the 1985-86 figures quoted in the letter of 5 June 1986 from the then Under-Secretary of State the deductions in the allowances payable referred to would reduce income maintenance costs for each of the relevant schemes by:

Assumed deductions in allowances per single person aged 16 years and over and dependent spouse

£ million

	(a) £10	*(b)* £23
Adult training	9·00	21·0
YTS[1]	178·00	409·0
Community[1] industry	3·50	8·1
Enterprise[1] allowance scheme	25·85	59·4
Employment rehabilitation	1·60	3·6

[1] There is no additional allowance for dependent spouse.

The reductions in income maintenance costs used in the reply have been calculated on the assumption that the assumed deductions from the allowances would have left all other aspects of the scheme, including take up, average survival etc., unchanged.

Employment Census

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General when the results of the 1987 employment census will be published.

Mr. Lee: The planning of the 1987 census is in its early stages and a detailed timetable has yet to be prepared. The information requested is therefore not yet available. However, I understand that the aim is to produce results some 18 months after the census reference date.

Sunderland Job Club

Mr. Clay asked the Paymaster General how many of the first 100 persons to find work as a result of being a member of Sunderland job club are currently in employment.

Mr. Lee: The Manpower Services Commission does not maintain contact with job club members after they leave the job club. Consequently, we cannot say how many of the first 100 job club members to find work are currently working.

Mr. Clay asked the Paymaster General how many of the first 100 persons to find work as a result of being a member of Sunderland job club are employed through the community programme.

Mr. Lee: The Manpower Services Commission has informed me that, of the first 100 people finding work, 33 joined the community programme.

Mr. Clay asked the Paymaster General how many people were members of Sunderland job club on 17 November 1986.

Mr. Lee: This information is not available in the precise form requested. However on 5 December 1986, the date on which statistics were collected, Sunderland job club had 26 members.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General if he will now take steps to collect information on the numbers of employees in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in those companies which have accepted trainees under the new training initiative pilot scheme in Dundee (i) prior to the trainees joining the companies, and (ii) one month after the trainees joined the companies.

Mr. Lee: Such information could be collected on a regular basis only at disproportionate cost. However, evaluation undertaken by independent consultants by sample survey will cover the effects of the job training scheme pilots.

Action for Jobs Programme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General (1) how many opinion formers and business leaders have been invited to the breakfast launches of the action for jobs programme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region;

(2) what was the total cost per head for breakfasts provided for business bodies and opinion formers at the action for jobs launches;

(3) out of whose budget the cost of the breakfast launches for action for jobs for opinion formers and business bodies comes;

(4) what has been the breakdown of costs for the breakfast launch of action for jobs on a region by region basis;

(5) what has been the total cost to the Government of the breakfast presentations to business leaders and opinion formers in relation to the action for jobs project;

(6) which cities and towns have been used for the launch of breakfast presentations by the action for jobs project.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Lord asked the Paymaster General if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to action for jobs to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Service Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 2 February to Friday 6 February 1987.

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General if he will name the managing agents in each of the pilot areas for the new job training scheme.

Mr. Lee: The managing agents in each of the ten areas piloting the new job training scheme are as follows:
Dundee—Dundee Training for Employment and Enterprise Project (DTEEP) and Skills Training Agency.
Billingham—Cleveland County Council.
Preston — Kedder Training Agency Ltd. and Business Support Unit Limited.
Huddersfield — Kirklees and Wakefield Chamber of Commerce.
Stoke—Quantum Business Service and Longacre Personnel Consultants Ltd.
Port Talbot—A consortium of the Skills Training Agency Afan College and Neath College.
Plymouth—The Chamber of Commerce and Training and Skills Training Agency.
Crawley—North Sussex Youth Training Association and Skills Training Association.
Ealing—London Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
Leicester—Skills Training Agency.

Sex Discrimination Act

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Paymaster General how many actions have been brought against employers under the Sex Discrimination Act in each of the following years (i) 1982, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1984, (iv) 1985 and (v) 1986.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of applications to industrial tribunals under the Sex Discrimination Act were:

	Number
1982	442
1983	350
1984	376
1985	449
[1]1986	548

[1] To end of November only.

A small proportion of these applications relate to the treatment of partners not employees. It is not possible to identify these separately.

Restart Programme

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Paymaster General how many people in Avon have left the employment register through the restart programme since it started.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Paymaster General how many people entered the youth training scheme in Hyndburn and North East Lancashire in 1985; what was the placement percentage; and how many people completed the scheme.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Intervention Stores

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what are the operational costs of keeping grain stored in intervention in Humberside per year; and what is the market value of the grain stored;

(2) what are the operational costs of keeping butter stored in intervention in Norfolk per year; and what is the market value of the butter stored;

(3) what are the operational costs of keeping butter stored in intervention in Lincolnshire per year; and what is the market value of the butter stored;

(4) what are the operational costs of keeping butter stored in intervention in north Yorkshire per year; and what is the market value of the butter stored;

(5) what are the operational costs of keeping butter stored in intervention in Humberside per year; and what is the market value of the butter stored;

(6) what are the operational costs of keeping grain stored in intervention in Norfolk per year; and what is the market value of the grain stored;

(7) what are the operational costs of keeping grain stored in intervention in Lincolnshire per year; and what is the market value of the grain stored;

(8) what are the operational costs of keeping grain stored in intervention in north Yorkshire per year; and what is the market value of the grain stored.

Mr. Gummer: Storage costs are not recorded separately for different areas. The average annual costs of storage and handling are about £12·50/tonne for cereals and £81·50/tonne for butter. The current average market prices are £110 per tonne for feedwheat and barley and £1,835 per tonne for butter.

EC (Surplus Food and Wine)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to intensify the sale of existing surplus food and wine in the European Economic Community following the Council agreement of 16 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Council noted with approval the Commission's intention to undertake an accelerated programme of stock disposals in the milk sector.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether, within the environmentally sensitive areas, the payments announced on 18 December 1986 will be available to voluntary conservation bodies for the management of land purchased with the help of grant aid from statutory conservation bodies;

(2) if, within environmentally sensitive areas, the payments announced on 18 December 1986 will be available to all landowners managing land for agricultural purposes, including voluntary conservation bodies.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dr. David Clark Asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the Nature Conservancy Council is able to offer management agreement to

voluntary conservation bodies for land within environmentally sensitive areas purchased with the help of grant aid where it is designated as a site of special scientific interest.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

Yes, but the conditions on which such grant is made normally require the future management of the sites to be in the conservation interest. The question of management agreements does not therefore normally arise.

ALURE

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place the report of the alternative land use in the rural environment working party in the Library.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, Friday 16 January 1987]: No. The Government are considering land use in the context of the reform of the common agricultural policy, and I intend to keep the House informed about my policies in this area.

Mackerel (Scottish Fishing Fleet)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on the Scottish fishing fleet of the delay in approving entry into Falmouth bay for the Russian klondykers to transship the mackerel catch; and if he will make a statement;

(2) why the members of the Scottish fishing fleet who normally operate in the south-west mackerel box are being denied the right to commence catching; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987]: I understand that four Scottish vessels are currently operating in the Channel and they, like the rest of the Scottish pelagic fleet, are free to fish within the south-west mackerel box provided that they comply with the relevant Community technical conservation regulations, which prohibit fishing for mackerel in the box. I also understand that catches of mackerel outside the box have so far been fairly light and that there has been no difficulty in marketing catches.

I have consulted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on the use of Falmouth as a transshipment port for eastern bloc vessels and he has now concluded that there are no overriding objections to a limited transshipping operation at Falmouth on this occasion. We are now considering what detailed arrangements to make in consultation with the fishing industry.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

United States of America

28. **Mr. Forth** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last paid an official visit to the United States of America.

Mr. Tebbit: On 8 and 9 December 1986.

THE ARTS

Objects in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will specify the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half year ended 31 December 1986 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of capital transfer tax or inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed in the matter of allocation by testators or executors; whether he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of capital transfer tax or inheritance tax; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply.

Mr. Luce: The information is as follows:

Item	*Conditions*	*Allocation*
Items allocated since 1 July 1986		
Nine paintings by Ben Nicholson	Wish expressed that two paintings should go to the Tate Gallery and one each should go to the Fitzwilliam and Ashmolean Museums	Tate Gallery, Ashmolean Museum, Manchester City Art Gallery, Bristol City Art Gallery, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum, York City Art Gallery, Cleveland Art Gallery
Bronze sculpture by Hans Arp	Wish expressed to go to Tate Gallery	Tate Gallery
Items awaiting allocation		
Three Flemish Still-life paintings	Wish expressed that they go to the National Gallery	*Date of acceptance* 21 August 1986
Archive from the Dukes of Portland and Newcastle	Wish expressed that it goes to Nottingham University Library, Nottingham Record Library, Bodleian Library, British Library, Hampshire Record Office	14 March 1986

In addition, I am pleased to announce the acceptance in lieu of tax of the following items since my answer of 16 December 1986:

		Tax satisfied £
Mother and Child, sculpture relief by Sir Jacob Epstein	Conditional — to go to Birmingham City Art Gallery and Museum	10,470
Portrait of a Man by Rogier van der Weyden	Conditional—to go to the Home House Trustees on behalf of the Courtauld Institute	467,500

A press notice will be issued to publicise this information.

Export Licences

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half year ended 31 December 1986, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was eventually exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; whether he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the comprehensive information given in his reply, in accordance with the practice established on 6 February 1986.

Mr. Luce: The items for which export licences were withheld for a period on the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art are as follows. The valuation has been omitted in two cases when the owner wished it to remain confidential. Details of the items listed were given in press notices issued at the time of the Minister's decision; however, a further press notice will be issued.

Description of item	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
A silver cup and cover by Joseph Preedy	28,500	Licence suspended for three months. Purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum.
A self portrait by Hans Leonhard Schaufelein	133,800	Licence suspended for three months. Licence granted.
A Lambeth Delft figure of Apollo c. 1679	60,885	Licence suspended for three months until 28 January 1987
A marble bust of Shakespeare by John Michael Rysbrack	307,260	Licence suspended for six months until 28 April 1987 following a review of the situation two months after the beginning of the export stop.
A statue of Diana by Nollekens	97,707	Licence suspended for three months until 28 January 1987.
A painting "An extensive view of Salisbury" English school c. 1780	—	Licence suspended for five months to 2 May 1987
A portrait of Lord George Stuart, Seigneur D'Aubigny by Sir Anthony Van Dyck	—	Licence suspended for three months to 2 March 1987.
The Achavrail armlet	100,000	Licence suspended for three months to 2 March 1987.
Three Anglo Saxon burial urns	5,500	Licence suspended for three months to 2 March 1987.
An Anglo Saxon black clay vessel with lid of bulbous form	6,000	Licence suspended for three months to 2 March 1987.

Museums and Galleries (Attendance)

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1986 reported by the National Museum and Galleries in England for which he is responsible, broken down to the individual institutions but comprising their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1985; and whether, in the case of the National Maritime Museum, he will in addition specify the number of admission tickets sold.

Mr. Luce: For the 10 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible, the information requested is as follows:

	Estimated attendance in 1986	*Percentage change from 1985*
British Museum	3,869,639	− 6·6
Imperial War Museum	1,175,834	− 9·0
National Gallery	3,182,365	+ 0·8
National Maritime Museum	380,099	−36·6
National Portrait Gallery	624,520	+21·0
Science Museum	4,838,462	+ 5·0
Tate Gallery	1,153,355	+15·7
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,439,636	−30·4
Wallace Collection	170,797	− 4·7
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1,163,304	[1]

[1] Because of the reorganisation of Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, figures cannot be compared with earlier years.

The National Maritime Museum sold 363,983 tickets in 1986, a drop of 19·7 per cent. on 1985. The level of charge remained constant for 1985 and 1986. A number of factors contributed to the overall reduction in visitor levels. Other museums record visitors by a variety of methods, and in most cases are regarded as being accurate to within 5 per cent. only. This limits the interpretation of apparent annual changes in attendance, which may also be affected by other factors including, for example, the numbers of overseas visitors to London at individual museums and galleries.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the cost of issuing an income tax return form for every taxpayer every year;

(2) what ways of getting information about a taxpayer's income sources other than issuing an income tax return to him the Inland Revenue is examining.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Shipping Industry (Capital Allowances)

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the annual pattern of capital allowances arising over a 10-year period for each £100 million of investment in British-owned merchant ships under the tax regime for investment in shipping currently in force; and if he will give the same information in relation to the schemes for 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. capital allowances, respectively, proposed by the shipping industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Tombstones

Mr. Walters asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax was collected on the sale of tomb headstones during the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: I regret that information is not available on which to base an estimate.

Mr. Walters asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider reviewing the question of tax on tombstones, in view of the additional distress this may cause to bereaved relatives of the deceased.

Mr. Brooke: This has been considered on a number of occasions, but the conclusion has always been that the relief in this area should be limited to the basic cost of funerals and that it should not extend to commemorative items, the provision of which has been regarded as a matter of choice rather than necessity.

Mr. Walters asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the classification of tomb headstones as non-essential goods and therefore liable to value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: A small number of individual letters are received each year from hon. Members and members of the public.

Funeral and Cremation Services

Mr. Walters asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the funeral and cremation services that are exempt from value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: Group 8 of schedule 6 to the VAT Act 1983 has the effect of exempting essential supplies associated with burials and cremations: these include the services of the undertaker, the supply of coffins, urns and caskets, the digging of graves and the disposal of ashes. It does not cover discretionary expenditure such as gravestones or flowers.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of retirement pensioners are higher rate taxpayers.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987, c. *231*]: It is estimated that about 1·7 per cent. of married couples and single people aged over 65 will be liable to higher rate tax in 1986-87.

WALES

Labour Statistics

8. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 11 December 1986, the total numbers of unemployed claimants in the Newport travel-to-work area, Gwent and Wales were 12,558, 27,923 and 173,546 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 are not available on a comparable basis.

Unoccupied School Places

9. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many unoccupied school places there are in primary and in secondary schools in Wales and in Clwyd.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At January 1987, there are estimated to be 16,700 unoccupied primary places and 5,200 secondary places in Clwyd and 99,400 unoccupied primary places and 46,700 secondary places in Wales.

Secondary School Population

10. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the fall in the secondary school population in Wales for the last three and the estimates for the next five years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Secondary pupil numbers fell by some 13,700 between January 1984 and January 1986. They are estimated to fall by a further 33,100 by January 1991.

Opencast Mining

11. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the forthcoming application for opencast mining at Pont Einion, Northop.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This proposal will be for Clwyd county council to consider, as mineral planning authority. It would not be proper for me to meet an applicant for planning permission to discuss his application.

Orthopaedic Operations (Mid Glamorgan)

12. **Mr. Rowlands** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of waiting lists for orthopaedic operations in the Mid Glamorgan area health authority.

Mr. Mark Robinson: At 30 September 1986, 1,586 people were waiting for in-patient trauma and orthopaedic treatment in Mid Glamorgan health authority.

Houses (Multiple Occupation)

13. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to improve conditions in houses in multiple occupation in Wales.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Local authorities already have wide powers to control conditions in houses in multiple occupation. In the light of recently completed research commissioned by the Government, I am considering how I can further encourage authorities to use their powers and am seeking to identify any areas of specific concern where further action may be necessary.

Rail Operations (North Wales)

14. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss rail operations in north Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman on 25 November and discussed a number of matters with him, including rail services in north Wales.

Unemployment (Cynon Valley)

15. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his plans to combat unemployment in the Cynon valley and the rest of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Government will continue to reinforce the range of policies, including the valleys initiative from which the Cynon valley benefits, and which in the last year have produced a steady fall in unemployment in Wales and have helped to achieve record factory allocations, large-scale investment and substantial growth in the number of new businesses.

Hypothermia

16. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the number of deaths in Wales each winter since 1979 due to hypothermia.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The numbers of deaths whereby hypothermia is mentioned on the death certificate in Wales during the period January-March in each year from 1979 to 1986 were 52, 21, 22, 38, 10, 20, 35 and 25 respectively.

Enveloping Schemes (Ynys Môn)

17. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the enveloping schemes adopted in Ynys Môn.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Ynys Môn borough council's activities in enveloping are praiseworthy and four schemes have already brought about external renovation of 239 houses at a total cost of £1·5 million. I hope both these and enveloping schemes elsewhere in Wales will encourage those activities which have yet to employ this most useful renovation technique.

Dual Carriageway

18. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of dual carriageway he expects to open in Wales in 1987.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: 11.3 miles comprising the A48 Cross Hands-Llanddarog by-pass and A483 Ruabon by-pass and Wynnstay link.

Assisted Places Scheme

20. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of total spending in Welsh schools is represented by expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In 1985-86, expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales represented 0·126 per cent. of the total spending in Welsh maintained schools.

Water Charges

21. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Welsh water authority to discuss the recently introduced changes to water charges.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Ministers reguarly meet the chairman of the Welsh water authority to discuss financial and other matters. Charges are among the topics we discussed at the most recent meeting last October. The Welsh water authority has still to decide the level of charges for 1987-88.

Milk Quotas

22. **Dr. Roger Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline the steps he proposes to take to stop the outflow of milk quotas from the dairy farming areas of south-west Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have no plans to take such steps. In the period 1 April 1985 to 17 November 1986, a net 4·2 million litres of quota were transferred out of south Wales, which represents only 0·4 per cent. of the total quota allocated to holdings in south Wales.

Powys Area Health Authority

23. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what additional revenue income he proposes to allocate to Powys area health authority in the financial year 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: In 1987-88, Powys district health authority will have a revenue allocation of nearly £25 million, an increase of just under 6 per cent. over 1986-87 over the previous year. Included in this is a special addition of £39,000 in view of the authority's restricted scope for generating additional revenue income, which is only likely to amount to about £17,000 in the year in question.

Cardiff Dock

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total estimated expenditure on the proposed Cardiff dock harbour scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: It is not possible at this stage to make a precise estimate of total expenditure. However, expenditure by the proposed Cardiff Bay development corporation is expected to be about £45 million in the period 1987-88 to 1989-90 and private sector investment is expected to be several times that amount over the period of the development.

District Councils (Expenditure)

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current total annual expenditure of district councils in Wales for grant purposes.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In 1986-87 the total expenditure of district councils in Wales for block grant purposes was budgeted to be £240·9 million.

Cervical Cancer

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by health authority, the time taken for individual smear tests for cervical cancer to be analysed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information requested is not available centrally.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1986 reported by the National Museum of Wales, comprising its outstations, together with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1985.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A total of 712,267 people visited the National Museum of Wales during 1986, a decrease of 6·9 per cent. on the attendance figures for 1985.

Health Education

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will consider setting up a new generalist Welsh health promotional body to encompass all aspects of health education provision in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 16 January.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what funds have been made available by his Department for health education in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: There is a health education element to many projects funded under a number of schemes operated by the Department. Finance for main initiatives is as follows:—

	£000
1978-79	176·2
1979-80	192·0
1980-81	221·8
1981-82	384·7
1982-83	457·2
1983-84	622·5
1984-85	693·3
1985-86	1,132·2
[1]1986-87	1,495·4

[1] Best estimate but not of full year cost.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the report of the review of the Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales.

Mr. Mark Robinson: In view of the reply by my right hon. Friend on Friday, 16 January, announcing the establishment of a special health authority with responsibility for health education in Wales, it has been decided not to pursue the review of the Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department have supported in health education since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Department has instigated and supported a great many initiatives either through

grant aid or advisory services since 1983. Health education is an element of numerous local and national schemes, not all of which can be identified separately.

Identifiable support has been centred on the work of the Health Education Council in Wales, such as Heartbeat Wales, the Welsh AIDS Campaign, cancer screening, alcohol abuse and the work of voluntary bodies such as Action on Smoking and Health and Council of Wales of Voluntary Youth Services. A major Welsh Office initiative has been the campaign to combat drug misuse. Most recent has been the announcement of 16 January by the Secretary of State to establish a special health authority in Wales with responsibility for health education.

M4 (Signs)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those tourist or historic attractions which are signposted on the M4.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There are no tourist or historic attractions signposted on the M4 in Wales. In the light of the new signing scheme brought in last year it is open to operators of attractions with 75,000 visitors a year to apply for signs.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements are made to ensure that the illuminated hazard warning signs on the M4 motorway are switched off immediately after the hazard has been removed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Operation of the illuminated hazard warning signs on the M4 motorway in Wales is a matter for the appropriate police force.

Roadworks (Warnings)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he is satisfied with the standard of advance hazard warning signs on approaches to roadworks in Wales;

(2) if he is satisfied with the standard of advance hazard warning signs on approaches to roadworks on the M4 motorway.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We are satisfied that the national signing standards which specify the way in which motorists should be forewarned of roadworks are known and used by those undertaking roadworks in Wales. The day-to-day monitoring of such signs is the responsibility of contractors and the highway authority's representative on site. Occasionally checks are carried out by local highway auhority engineers or Welsh Office engineers in the case of trucks and the motorway in Wales.

M4 (Lighting)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to ensure that overhead lighting is installed on the M4 motorway whenever carriageway repairs are being undertaken.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Where lengthy periods of repair work are required on the M4 motorway and where one carriageway is closed and the other in use for two-way traffic, temporary overhead lighting is required to be provided at crossover points. We have no plans to extend this requirement.

Road Safety Education

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if all schools in Wales are complying with the Vienna conference of Transport Ministers (1971) recommendation that a minimum number of hours, between 10 and 20, should be allocated for road safety education on the basis of the scale drawn up by the Vienna conference for the different classes and levels.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available.

Mental Illness

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what were the number of beds for the treatment of mental illness in Wales in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1982 and *(c)* the latest available year for (i) general hospitals, (ii) mental hospitals and (iii) other residential facilities.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Information on the numbers of beds and places available for the treatment of mental illness in Wales is given in the following table:

	1972	*1982*	*1985*
National Health Service hospitals			
Non-psychiatric hospitals [1] [2]	154·2	307·8	474·8
Psychiatric hospitals [1] [2]	6,467·3	4,741·9	4,353·5
Private hospital/nursing homes [3]	n/a	43	89
Local authority, voluntary and private residential homes [4]	n/a	713	603

[1] The specialties included are mental illness, psychiatric children, adolescent psychiatry, psycho-geriatric and elderly mentally infirm.
[2] Average daily available beds for year ending 31 December.
[3] Available beds as at 31 December.
[4] Number of available places as at 31 March.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give *(a)* total gross expenditure on the National Health Service, *(b)* revenue expenditure on hospital and community health service and *(c)* capital expenditure on hospital and community health services, for each year since 1974-75 in cash terms and adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator and National Health Service pay and prices index.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information is given in the following tables:

Total NHS Gross Expenditure

£ million

Year	Cash (1)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by GDP deflator (2)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by NHS pay and prices index (3)
1974-75	206·9	699·8	760·8
1975-76	278·0	748·2	796·5
1976-77	312·2	742·3	792·1
1977-78	353·2	737·4	818·4
1978-79	405·0	764·0	845·6
1979-80	474·7	766·3	828·8
1980-81	611·7	832·3	840·5
1981-82	697·5	863·9	879·5
1982-83	769·0	888·2	902·0
1983-84	816·1	902·1	911·6
1984-85	882·6	935·6	931·1
1985-86	941·7	941·7	941·7

Gross Revenue Expenditure on Hospital and Community Health Services

£ million

Year	Cash (1)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by GDP deflator (2)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by HCHS pay and prices index (3)
1974-75	141·0	476·9	511·4
1975-76	187·9	505·7	528·9
1976-77	214·8	510·8	531·4
1977-78	241·8	504·8	550·6
1978-79	274·5	517·8	570·4
1979-80	326·6	527·2	563·1
1980-81	424·9	578·2	572·3
1981-82	478·7	592·9	596·5
1982-83	516·9	597·0	604·8
1983-84	544·1	601·4	605·6
1984-85	584·9	620·0	615·3
1985-86	624·8	624·8	624·8

Gross Capital Expenditure on Hospital and Community Health Services

£ million

Year	Cash (1)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by GDP deflator (2)	Adjusted to 1985-86 prices by HCHS pay and prices index (3)
1974-75	15·3	51·7	50·5
1975-76	23·1	62·2	58·4
1976-77	18·0	42·8	40·6
1977-78	21·1	44·1	41·7
1978-79	23·7	44·7	41·9
1979-80	24·3	39·2	35·6
1980-81	31·6	43·0	36·7
1981-82	41·4	51·3	46·6
1982-83	47·1	54·4	52·2
1983-84	49·8	55·0	54·3
1984-85	52·5	55·7	55·2
1985-86	54·7	54·7	54·7

Gross NHS expenditure includes income from sales of surplus land and property. No separate NHS pay and price factors are maintained for Wales. The figures at column 3 have been constructed using pay and price indices maintained for England by the Department of Health and Social Security.

Prescription Charges and Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will update the information on prescription charges and the cost of pharmaceuticals given on 12 December 1985, *Official Report*, columns *699-700*, by giving figures for subsequent years up to the most recent available date.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information required is set out in the following table:

	1985 1st Quarter	1985 2nd Quarter	1985 3rd Quarter	1985 4th Quarter	1986 1st Quarter	1986 2nd Quarter	1986 3rd Quarter	1985-86
Prescriptions dispensed	6,923,853	6,160,580	6,293,921	6,792,709	6,525,800	6,544,984	6,574,943	25,773,010
Per cent. Prescriptions exempt from charges	84·6	85·9	85·6	85·9	85·9	86·5	86·4	85·8
a. Payments by Patients (excluding pre-payment certificates) £ million	1·6	1·7	1·7	1·8	1·8	1·8	1·9	6·9
b. Payments from Public Funds (c−a) £ million	28·4	26·4	27·6	29·4	28·7	29·7	30·3	112·1
c. Total costs £ million	30·0	28·1	29·3	31·2	30·5	31·5	32·2	119·0
d. Average cost per prescription (gross) £	4·33	4·56	4·65	4·59	4·67	4·81	4·90	4·62
No. and type of pre-payment certificates								
— 4 monthly	5,789	3,972	4,825	4,974	5,703	4,716	5,306	19,474
— 12 monthly	14,023	5,455	5,909	6,179	11,851	5,645	5,576	29,394
Revenue from sale of pre-payment certificates								
— 4 monthly	49,209	43,689	53,083	54,714	62,740	56,589	63,664	214,226
— 12 monthly	336,553	166,370	180,201	128,460	361,446	189,117	186,801	896,477
Total	385,762	210,059	233,284	243,174	424,186	245,706	250,465	1,110,703

Note: The figure for Public Funds does not include pre-payment certificate income (shown separately in the above table) as this cannot be exactly attributed to the financia' quarter in which certificates are purchased.

Welsh Photographic Museum

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the composition of the working party he has set up to examine the location of the Welsh photographic museum.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The working party has been set up by the National Museum of Wales and also comprises the National Library of Wales, Swansea city council, the Welsh Arts Council and the Royal Institution of South Wales.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if Lliw Valley borough council has been consulted by his Department regarding the location of the Welsh photographic museum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. It is for the working party to decide who to consult.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a breakdown of the estimates of his Welsh office for 1987-88, as published in table 2-3 of the "Autumn Statement", Cmnd. 14, indicating how his estimated spending for that year of £3,190 million will be distributed between the various functions within his responsibility, and also showing the expected 1986-87 autumn spending for each of these functions.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 3.17 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90" (Cmnd. 56-II).

National Health Service

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the National Health Service in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: There have been considerable medical advances and service improvements in the NHS in Wales since 1979. The growth in recurrent revenue resources allocated to district health authorities over this period now amounts to 33 per cent. after adjustment for inflation using the GDP deflator; and over the same period capital provision of £490 million, at 1987-88 prices, has been made available. I am satisfied that this amounts to significant achievement

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1986 reported by the Ulster Museum, comprising its outstations, together with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1986, 290,500 people visited the Ulster Museum and the Armagh county museum, an increase of less that 1 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1985.

Prescription Charges and Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will update the information on prescription charges and the cost of pharmaceuticals given on 12 December 1985, *Official Report*, columns *730-2*, by giving figures for subsequent years up to the most recent available date.

Mr. Viggers: The information requested on prescriptions dispensed by chemist contractors and appliance suppliers is as follows:

Prescriptions Dispensed by Chemist and Appliance Suppliers

Period	*Prescriptions Dispensed (000)*	*Percentage exempt from [1]charges*	*Patients Contributions (Excluding Prepayment Certificates) (£000)*	*Payment from Public Funds (£ 000)*	*Total Cost (£ 000)*	*Average Gross Cost per Prescription £*	*Number and Type of Prepayment Certificates*		*Revenue from sale of Prepayment Certificates £*
							4 month	12 month	
Quarter Ended									
31 December 1985	3,468	87·92	841	16,136	17,035	4·90	1,252	1,412	57,900
31 March 1986	3,389	87·97	818	16,024	16,938	4·99	1,464	2,758	96,335
30 June 1986	3,216	88·49	817	16,521	17,409	5·41	1,224	1,493	70,932
30 September 1986	3,190	88·55	806	16,858	17,721	5·56	1,414	1,078	56,625
Financial Year									
1985-86	12,928	87·72	3,185	61,569	65,016	5·03	4,240	6,199	262,010

[1] This figure includes approximately 4 per cent. of prescriptions which are exempt because of the purchase of prepayment certificates.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry, in July, August, September, October, November and December 1986, respectively; if he will give the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; whether any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being concluded; and if he will indicate the reasons for the search, namely, making an appearance attion court on remand (and at which court), attending trial, inter-prison visit or other reasons.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is as follows:

	July	August	September	October	November	December
Total number of searches carried out	43	33	23	57	34	33
Total number of inmates searched	25	18	14	32	20	21
Number of prisoners searched once	10	6	7	10	9	9
Number of prisoners searched twice	13	10	6	19	9	12
Number of prisoners searched three times	1	1	—	3	1	—
Number of prisoners searched four times	1	1	1	—	1	—
First admission on remand awaiting trial	8	6	7	7	5	7
First admission on sentence final discharge	14	11	5	19	18	17
Attending Lisburn Remand Court	—	2	—	1	—	1
Attending Belfast Remand Court	1	—	2	—	1	1
Attending Ballymena Remand Court	1	—	—	—	—	—
Attending Limavady Remand Court	1	—	—	—	—	—
Attending Newtownards Remand Court	1	—	—	—	—	—
Attending Antrim Remand Court	—	1	—	1	1	—
Attending Newry Remand Court	—	—	1	2	—	—
Attending Larne Remand Court	—	—	—	1	—	—
Attending Enniskillen Remand Court	—	—	—	—	1	1
Attending trial	1	—	—	1	—	—
Attending Appeal Court	—	4	—	4	—	—
Bail Court appearances	7	4	3	6	3	4
Going on or returning from home leave	2	4	5	5	4	1
Inter prison visits	4	—	—	9	—	—
Visits to outside hospital	3	1	—	1	1	1

No prohibited article was found during the searches and no prisoner refused to be searched.

Prisoners (Police Maltreatment)

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what were the number of allegations of police maltreatment of prisoners held in their custody under the emergency provisions in Northern Ireland during the years 1975 to 1985 on a year-by-year basis; how many investigations were held; and how many of the allegations were upheld during the same years, again on a year by year basis;

(2) what was the number of allegations of police maltreatment of prisoners in their custody in Northern Ireland other than under emergency powers during the years 1975 to 1985 on a year-by-year basis; how many investigations were held; and how many of the allegations were upheld during the same years, again on a year by year basis.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Convictions (Statistics)

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of those convicted on a year-by-year basis since 1975 on uncorroborated contested confession evidence.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Health Services

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give *(a)* the total gross expenditure on health services, *(b)* total expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(c)* revenue expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(d)* capital expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(e)* expenditure on family practitioner services, *(f)* expenditure on centrally funded services and *(g)* expenditure on personal social services for each year since 1974-75 in cash terms and adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator and the relevant indexes of pay and prices.

Mr. Viggers: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Grand Committee

36. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Lord Privy Seal whether he has any plans to bring forward proposals for a change in the role of the Welsh Grand Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: I have no such plans at present.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing Benefit

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of supplementary benefit recipients do not receive housing benefit.

Mr. Lyell: About 28 per cent.
[Source: Quarterly statistical inquiry, February 1986.]

Drug Misuse (Campaign)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's evaluation of their drug misuse prevention campaign in 1986 and on future proposals.

Mrs. Currie: Market research designed to evaluate the drug misuse prevention campaign for the financial year 1986-87 has recently been undertaken and we expect to receive the report shortly. I will place a summary of the report in the Library. We will be considering plans for the future of the campaign in the light of that evaluation.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each health authority in England *(a)* the total number of ambulances in service, *(b)* the number of ambulances that meets the Department of Health and Social Security guidance of 140,000 miles and seven years and *(c)* the number of ambulances that do not meet the Department of Health and Social Security guidance of 140,000 miles and seven years.

Mr. Newton: The table shows, for each National Health Service regional health authority, the numbers of all types of ambulance vehicles in use in the last year for which these figures are available. I regret that information is not collected centrally on the length in service or mileage completed by ambulances used by health authorities in England.

NHS Ambulance Services: Ambulance vehicles (all types)

Regional Health Authority	*1984-85*
Northern	470
Yorkshire	636
Trent	648
East Anglian	219
North West Thames	193
North East Thames	148
South East Thames	300
South West Thames (including London Ambulance Service)	1,184
Wessex	297
Oxford	284
South Western	480
West Midlands	713
Mersey	351
North Western	568

Source: York Health Authority Financial and Statistical Information.

Mental Illness

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the number of beds for the treatment of mental illness in England in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1982 and *(c)* the latest available year for (i) general hospitals, (ii) mental hospitals and (iii) other residential facilities.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Prescription Charges and Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update the information given on 13 January 1986, *Official Report*, columns *501-2*, on prescription charges and the cost of pharmaceuticals by giving figures for subsequent years up to the most recent available date.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update the reply of 21 July 1986, *Official Report*, column *100*, by giving for 1985 the figures for the available number of beds daily by region with a breakdown for acute, maternity and geriatric, and so on.

Mrs. Currie: The information for 1985 is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds in National Health Service hospitals in England (1985)

Region	*Acute*[1]	*Geriatric*	*Mental*[2] *illness*	*Mental handicap*	*Maternity*[3]	*All specialties*
Northern	9,698	3,940	5,695	2,990	1,208	23,773
Yorkshire	11,168	4,960	6,199	2,947	1,374	26,793
Trent	11,665	5,237	6,700	3,936	1,617	29,391
East Anglian	5,204	2,467	2,702	1,450	670	12,534
North West Thames	9,052	3,417	6,542	3,627	1,092	23,816
North East Thames	12,262	4,636	6,053	2,313	1,446	26,854
South East Thames	10,510	3,985	5,886	2,546	1,224	24,297
South West Thames	7,131	2,907	6,196	5,160	785	22,210
Wessex	7,409	3,468	3,688	2,074	980	17,654
Oxford	5,863	1,866	2,282	1,641	793	12,555
South Western	8,672	3,782	4,685	3,644	1,020	21,932
West Midlands	13,967	6,176	7,101	3,891	1,825	33,108
Mersey	7,092	3,120	5,342	2,027	840	18,464
North Western	12,472	5,230	6,337	3,307	1,589	29,021
Special Health Authorities	2,303	130	459	8	187	3,086
Total[4]	134,468	55,321	75,867	41,561	16,650	325,488

[1] "Acute" is defined as all specialties except geriatrics, younger disabled, GP maternity, obstetrics, mental handicap and mental illness.
[2] Includes all mental illness specialties.
[3] Includes GP maternity and obstetrics.
[4] Regional figures may not sum to national totals due to rounding.

AIDS

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what conveniently available figures he has for the cost of treatment for one year of an AIDS victim.

Mr. Newton: The average cost of hospital in and out-patient treatment of an AIDS patient in England has been estimated to be between £10,000 and £20,000 from diagnosis to death. Further work is being undertaken on costs generally.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the average expenditures per week on food for the following supplementary benefits claimants: *(a)* an adult, *(b)* a person 16 to 17 years of age, *(c)* a child 11 to 15 years of age, and *(d)* a child under 11 years of age as recorded by the "Family Expenditure Survey" in 1984; and what are these average expenditures, adjusted for inflation in 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Major: I regret that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest available figures for pensioners in receipt of supplementary benefit, households with a child under the age of two years in receipt of supplementary benefit, and households with a chronically sick or disabled person in receipt of supplementary benefit in Thurrock, together with the overall latest available figures for supplementary benefit recipients in Thurrock.

Mr. Lyell: Thurrock is covered for social security purposes by the Department's local office at Grays. The following information only is available about people receiving supplementary benefit from that office otherwise than at disproportionate cost.

	Number
Number of pensioners receiving supplementary pension	3,818
Total number of people receiving supplementary benefit	11,723

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action on 16 December 1986.

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the maternity benefits available in the United Kingdom and all other European Economic Community countries giving (i) the rates at which these are paid, (ii) the duration of payment and (iii) the qualifying conditions for each benefit.

Mr. Lyell: I refer the hon. Member to section I of the Department's publication, "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the European Communities (Position at 1 January 1986)", a copy of which is in the Library.

Food (Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the data base used by his Department to determine the average expenditures on food, referred to in clause 4736 of "Guidelines for SBO's and Procedural Instructions—Supplementary Benefits" ('S' Manual), in the calculation of the extra costs of special diets.

Mr. Major: These figures are provided by the chief adjudication officer as part of his guidance to the independent adjudication officers. The amounts were originally derived from the 1979 family expenditure survey and have subsequently been increased in line with the food element of the retail price index. They were last increased in November 1985.

Children's Homes

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take, in the light of the recent attempts at arson at Worth House, Herne Bay, and public complaints concerning the standard of supervision at Ava Lodge, Sydney House School, Westgate-on-Sea, to implement powers of inspection of private children's homes and to ensure that these and similar establishments are adequately staffed at all times by qualified personnel and properly run.

Mrs. Currie: There are differences between the two establishments named by my hon. Friend, although I understand that they are in common ownership. They were the subject of a joint visit by an officer of the social services inspectorate and Her Majesty's inspectors of schools in September 1986.

Worth House is a privately run home and therapeutic centre for young people with emotional and other problems, most of whom are in the care of local authorities.

Regulations providing power of registration and governing the conduct of privately run children's homes accommodating at least one child in the care of a local authority will be introduced later this year. There are existing powers under section 74 of the Child Care Act 1980 which provide for the inspection of premises accommodating children in care and the children themselves, but these do not provide a power of registration or closure. The powers under section 74 are in addition to the duty of placing authorities to consider the needs of children in their care and to determine the most suitable and appropriate placement for them.

Sydney House School, Westgate-on-Sea, has been registered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science as an independent school under part 3 of the Education Act 1944. Under section 77 of the Act such establishments are open to inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools.

Private Medicine

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the total income received from private patients for each year since 1979 by each health district region by region.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Junior Hospital Doctors

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his Department's estimate of the effect of the implementation of the new medical manpower plans on the hours worked by junior doctors;

(2) what is his policy in relation to the proposed goal of 80 hours work a week maximum for junior hospital doctors recommended by the Social Services Committee in 1981.

Mr. Newton: I assume the hon. Member means 80 hours on duty. The Government have taken positive steps to encourage reductions in the excessive hours traditionally required of some junior doctors. We have banned rotas requiring juniors to be on duty on average more than one night and one weekend in two, and initiated a review of rotas more onerous than one in three. We estimate that the number of such rotas in England was reduced by some 30 per cent.—from 5,000 to 3,500—between 1983 and 1985. Average hours of duty have fallen from 91·3 in 1976 to 85·9 in 1986, while independent surveys show that the

average number of hours actually worked fell from 58·3 to 57 between 1981 and 1985. We have set rotas of one in three, roughly equivalent to 84 hours' duty, as a target maximum commitment for the future, and we expect health authorities to keep the need for remaining onerous rotas under continuing review.

We also want to see the hospital service developed in ways that are less heavily reliant on junior doctors. We have undertaken wide consultations on a package of measures to improve hospital medical staffing, and are now considering the outcome with representatives of the profession.

These proposals should make it possible substantially to reduce the numbers of doctors in the training grades, but will not necessarily in themselves lead to a reduction in average hours of work.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* an index showing the movement in National Health Service pay and prices as affecting *(a)* revenue spending, *(b)* capital spending and *(c)* total spending for each calendar year since 1970, expressing 1970 as 100; and if he will publish another table giving that information for each financial year.

Mr. Newton: The available information is shown in the table. These indices are not available on a calendar year basis. Figures on a financial year basis are available from 1971-72.

	Index of hospital and community health services inflation		
Year	*Revenue*	*Capital*	*Total*
1971-72	100·0	100·0	100·0
1972-73	109·0	108·2	108·9
1973-74	119·6	123·9	120·1
1974-75	162·9	154·1	162·0
1975-76	209·8	201·3	209·0
1976-77	238·7	225·4	237·5
1977-78	259·2	257·7	259·1
1978-79	284·1	287·8	284·4
1979-80	342·4	347·4	342·8
1980-81	438·2	437·4	438·1
1981-82	474·2	451·4	472·4
1982-83	505·0	458·6	501·4
1983-84	530·6	465·9	525·7
1984-85	561·5	483·2	555·2
1985-86	590·7	[1]510·5	[1]583·9

[1] Provisional.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each health authority the percentage rise or fall in the total hospital waiting list between September 1982 and March 1986, ordered so that the health authority with the biggest increase is first and that with the biggest decrease is last, giving the numbers waiting in each health authority at those two points.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Brook Hospital

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what alternative specialist treatment and transport arrangements exist for patients in south-east Kent in the event of transfer of the neurological services at the Brook hospital.

Mrs. Currie: In the event of the transfer of the neurological service at the Brook hospital, medical manpower will be deployed more effectively so that out-patient sessions in local hospitals will be increased. Steps will also be taken to provide a high standard of training to cope with head injuries in all major accident and emergency departments to which patients are first referred.

The Brook and Maudsley hospitals are no more than seven miles apart, an additional journey of about 15 minutes on average for patients from south-east Kent who would continue to be conveyed to the new location by the ambulance service.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table indicating the total number of persons in Wales who have received the special heating payment for the week 12-18 January, analysed by each of the following categories *(a)* persons over 65 years of age, *(b)* persons registered as chronically sick or disabled and *(c)* families with children under two years of age.

Mr. Leadbitter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of persons in England who have received the special heating payment for 12 to 18 January in the age group categories and qualifications used by his Department; and if he will provide the same information for Cleveland county and Hartlepool.

Mr. Major: The information is not available. Local offices will be asked to make a return at the end of the winter period of the total number of payments and amounts paid.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reconsider the use of RAF Valley as the centre for measuring the local temperature for the Arfon borough area for the purposes of paying the special heating allowance; and if he will find a suitable location at Llanberis, Deiwiolen or Dinorwig for taking such readings.

Mr. Major: RAF Valley weather station was chosen in consultation with the Meteorological Office as being nearest to the main population centres in the area.

I understand that there are no weather stations which could be used in Llanberis, Deiwiolen or Dinorwig.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what allowance is made in temperature readings taken at Trawsfynydd for determining the elegibility of persons living at the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd districts for special heating payments, to take account of the relatively higher temperatures experienced at Trawsfynydd arising from use of the lake as a coolant for the nuclear power station in that vicinity.

Mr. Major: No special adjustments are made in the temperatures recorded at the Trawsfynydd weather station for the purposes of the exceptionally cold weather scheme.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to remove the £500 capital rule

for severe weather payments for pensioners, households with a child under two years of age or with a chronically sick or disabled person; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 25 November 1986 at column *191*.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the minimum night temperature, *(b)* the daily mean temperature, *(c)* the weekly mean temperature for each of the weather stations used for calculating severe weather payments for the week 5 January to 11 January inclusive.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his replies*, 15 and 16 January]: The following table gives information on the minimum night temperatures for the week 5 to 11 January inclusive, recorded at the 63 weather stations used to operate the new arrangements.

Minimum night temperatures (degrees celsius)
Week commencing 5 January 1987

Weather station	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*
Aberdeen AP	−0·2	0·8	1·3	−3·9	−7·8	−7·5	−5·6
Dumfries	4·6	1·3	−1·2	−6·7	−7·7	−3·5	−7·0
Edinburgh AP	1·1	1·6	−5·7	−7·6	−7·2	−6·2	−6·3
Eskdalemuir	1·8	0·6	−2·6	−9·8	−8·1	−4·1	−9·0
Fort William	2·0	0·8	−4·1	−7·8	−5·1	−3·7	−2·5
Glasgow AP	1·7	0·6	−5·5	−9·2	−5·0	−0·8	−4·3
Kinloss	0·7	0·9	0·9	−5·9	−7·2	−7·4	−6·0
Kirkwall	1·0	1·8	1·1	1·5	−0·8	0·3	−3·4
Lerwick	1·0	1·0	0·4	1·1	1·9	0·0	−3·1
Lewchars	0·6	1·8	−2·8	−6·8	−6·5	−4·1	−3·7
Machrihanish	2·8	4·1	−4·2	−2·4	−0·6	1·8	−2·0
Prestwick	2·9	2·1	−5·9	−6·2	−1·3	−0·2	−5·8
Stornaway	1·1	2·1	1·0	−0·7	2·0	−3·1	−2·7
Whithorn	5·7	1·8	−3·0	−4·6	1·0	−0·3	−3·0
Wick	0·3	0·2	0·4	−2·9	−2·8	0·3	−1·6
Aberporth	5·2	5·1	−0·8	−1·2	−0·5	1·6	−4·4
Brawdy	5·5	4·3	2·5	−2·8	−1·4	2·0	−4·2
Bristol	6·6	5·4	1·8	−2·8	−1·4	1·1	−5·0
Chivenor	6·9	5·8	−2·3	−3·2	−2·8	2·3	−3·7
Cilfyndd	5·0	2·5	−6·5	−4·6	−4·1	0·0	−5·9
Culdrose	6·9	4·5	−1·4	1·4	3·8	1·4	−0·2
Exeter	6·5	3·7	−2·4	−5·0	−3·5	0·8	−5·0
Lyneham	4·2	2·5	−1·5	−5·4	−5·3	−0·9	−8·3
Mumbles	6·4	4·6	0·5	0·9	1·6	2·9	−3·0
Okehampton	4·2	2·1	−3·8	−3·8	−2·2	0·3	−7·1
Rhoose	5·6	2·7	−2·3	−4·0	−3·4	0·7	−5·4
St. Mawgan	6·7	5·7	−2·2	−1·6	2·7	2·0	−2·8
Trawsfyndd	3·4	2·3	−2·2	−3·5	−3·5	−0·5	−6·2
Valley	6·1	5·5	−1·7	−2·8	−1·3	1·2	−4·4
Yeovilton	4·9	4·1	−3·4	−6·4	−6·2	0·7	−6·1
Brize Norton	4·2	2·7	−2·5	−5·8	−5·4	−1·1	−6·5
Boscombe Down	4·4	2·0	−2·4	−5·9	−4·5	0·0	−6·5
Bournemouth AP	5·0	3·3	−3·6	−6·9	−6·4	0·5	−6·1
Mount Batten	7·5	5·4	0·0	−1·2	1·5	1·2	−3·0
Easthampstead	5·0	2·7	−4·8	−6·3	−6·0	−0·9	−7·0
Gatwick AP	5·2	3·1	−1·5	−5·1	−2·8	−1·2	−5·7
Herstmonceux	5·5	0·7	−0·5	−4·0	−3·5	−1·4	−6·9
Manston	3·5	3·5	1·4	0·2	−4·7	−1·9	−5·4
Southampton WC	6·1	3·5	−0·5	−2·5	−1·9	1·0	−5·1
Heathrow AP	4·9	3·1	−1·4	−3·5	−2·8	−0·5	−5·7
Stansted	3·3	2·3	−2·8	−3·6	−6·3	−2·0	−7·7
Coltishall	2·1	2·6	0·2	−1·8	−5·8	−4·3	−5·8
Marham	2·3	1·7	−2·6	−4·5	−5·0	−2·0	−9·8
Wyton	4·1	1·1	−3·0	−2·5	−3·9	−2·0	−8·0
Wattisham	2·5	1·2	−2·4	−2·5	−5·3	−2·2	−9·0
Honington	2·9	1·2	−2·5	−1·8	−3·8	−2·2	−8·7
Bedford RAF	3·2	2·1	−2·1	−3·7	−4·8	−1·9	−8·6
Birmingham AP	4·4	2·0	−2·2	−6·8	−5·2	−1·3	−7·4
Shawbury	4·7	2·5	−3·5	−8·6	−7·2	−0·5	−6·9
Watnall	3·3	2·1	−0·6	−3·8	−5·8	−1·7	−6·8
Coningsby	3·0	2·1	−1·6	−2·1	−5·8	−1·4	−6·4
Binbrook	1·9	1·4	−0·8	−2·7	−4·2	−1·7	−6·2
Boulmer	2·1	2·5	1·2	−3·4	−4·4	−3·8	−5·0
Leeming	3·6	2·2	1·0	−5·4	−5·2	−3·0	−5·4
Leeds WC	3·6	2·1	1·2	−3·4	−3·5	−1·9	−5·8
Tynemouth	3·0	2·6	0·3	−2·3	−3·4	−3·0	−4·0
Finningley	4·5	2·6	−0·1	−5·0	−5·5	−2·0	−6·1
Whitby CG	2·6	2·3	1·2	−2·0	−4·3	−4·8	−5·0
Aughton	5·5	2·4	−0·5	−2·6	−2·8	0·0	−5·8
Blackpool AP	6·1	3·7	−0·6	−6·6	−5·4	−0·1	−6·5

Weather station	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Eskmeals	6·7	3·2	−5·2	−4·2	−3·4	1·1	−5·6
Manchester AP	4·3	2·4	−1·0	−4·0	−2·5	0·4	−5·6
Carlisle	5·0	1·0	−3·5	−6·1	−5·4	−2·4	−6·5

Mr. S. R. Edwards (Child Benefit)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the arrears of child benefit will be paid to Mr. S. R. Edwards, as promised in the letter of 16th July 1986 from the child benefit centre to Mr. Edwards; and whether he will explain why it has taken such a long time to pay this money to Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Lyell: This was a complex case but the arrears of benefit have now been paid. I am sending a detailed reply to the hon. Member's letter of 24 December 1986.

Drug Addicts

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he proposes to make plastic rather than glass syringes available to drug addicts at the centres announced in his answer of 18 December to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) *Official Report*, column *703*.

Mrs. Currie: Glass syringes require sterilisation between use. Experience has shown that injecting drug misusers do not always follow sterilising procedures when using injecting equipment.

Plastic syringes are for single use only and will help to reduce the risk of infection caused by the sharing of injecting equipment.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which special health authorities have beds available in special in-patient units for drug misusers.

Mrs. Currie: At December 1985 National Health Service returns indicated that there was a special unit exclusively for the in-patient treatment of drug dependence in Bethlem Royal and Maudsley special health authority hospital.

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many in-patient beds there are for registered drug addicts in Avon; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: On 31 December 1985 there were no special units in Bristol and Weston, Frenchay or Southmead district health authorities for the in-patient treatment of drug misusers. Most people admitted for drug misuse are treated in general psychiatric wards and not in beds specifically assigned for drug misuse.

Diabetics

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether diabetics requiring insulin injections will be precluded from obtaining disposable syringes or needles from the centres announced in his Answer of 18 December to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) *Official Report*, column *703*; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The schemes refered to in my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on 18 December at column *703* are being set up specifically to counter the spread of the AIDS virus among injecting drug misusers. Any exchange of used and possibly infected needles and syringes will be accompanied by advice and counselling for the individual's drug misuse problem and about AIDS and the risks of infection through the use of contaminated equipment.

If single use or disposable syringes and needles are necessary for diabetic treatment they may be supplied through the hospital service. Free reusable syringes and needles are supplied to all diabetic patients requiring them.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services pursuant to the answer of 15 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *415*, whether he had on that date already received a copy of the survey results distributed to the members of the equal opportunities task force of the King Edward's hospital fund on 24 November 1986.

Mrs. Currie: No. We have not received a copy of the survey which, from inquiries we made of the King Edward's fund task force, I understand is a summary of responses received to letters sent to health authorities about their equal opportunities policies. However, as I explained in my reply to the hon. Member, health authorities were advised when the task force was established not to wait for its advice but to press ahead in accordance with the Commission for Racial Equality's code of practice.

Board and Lodging

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any proposals for relaxing the restrictions on bed and breakfast accommodation and lodging allowances for the duration of the present cold spell.

Mr. Major: There is already an extensive list of exemption from the time limits on supplementary benefits board and lodging payments to protect vulnerable groups, such as the long-term sick and disabled. There is also a discretionary power to exempt in individual cases to prevent exceptional hardship.

Consultants

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's estimate of the impact of maintaining consultant expansion at 2 per cent. per annum or the 1982 goal.

Mr. Newton: The Government's response to the Social Services Committee's 1981 report on medical education suggested that health authorities should adopt the targets of doubling consultant numbers, and achieving a ratio of 1·8 consultants per junior, by 1996. This would have required consultant expansion of rather over 4 per cent. combined with substantial reductions in junior numbers. Subsequent experience showed that these targets were unrealistic, in part because they did not take sufficient account of the need to provide continuous, safe 24-hour cover in the acute specialties. The proposals in "Hospital

Medical Staffing: Achieving a Balance" address this problem, and in addition set forward specific measures for boosting the rate of consultant expansion above the rate of 2 to 2·5 per cent. per annum achieved in recent years.

Dispensing

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Carmarthen, 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *411-12*, he will hold discussions with retail pharmacists in order to improve the availability of facilities for the urgent dispensing of prescriptions so designated at all times irrespective of customary shop hours.

Mr. Newton: I would consider doing so were any serious problems with the present system to be brought to my attention.

General Practice Finance Corporation

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the level of funding being made available to the General Practice Finance Corporation for the forthcoming financial year; and if he will express in percentage terms the level of increase or decrease which that figure represents when compared to the current budget.

Mr. Newton: In the public expenditure White Paper published on 14 January, the cash limited provision for the General Practice Finance Corporation for the year 1987-88 amounted to £12 million. This figure is about 44 per cent. of the cash-limited provision made in 1986-87. The reasons for this change are set out in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South-West (Mr. Budgen) on 14 January at column *206*.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to allow the General Practice Finance Corporation to increase its borrowing limit.

Mr. Newton: We are currently considering the General Practice Finance Corporation's application to increase its statutory borrowing limit.

Abortions

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the numbers and percentages of legal abortions at durations of 20 to 28 weeks' gestation and totals by category of premises, statutory grounds and age of women for *(a)* residents and *(b)* non-residents of England and Wales for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Newton: The information is given in the tables.

Total numbers of notifications of legal abortions, those with gestation period of 20 weeks and over, and percentages. Residents and non-Residents—England and Wales—1984 and 1985

	1985		1984	
	Residents	*Non-residents*	*Residents*	*Non-residents*
(a) Total	141,101	30,772	136,388	33,605
(b) Gestation period 20 weeks and over	2,116	2,316	2,032	2,302
Percentage *(b)* of *(a)*	1·5	7·5	1·5	6·9

Number of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 at gestation period 20 weeks and over by statutory grounds, category of premises and age of women residents

England and Wales 1984

Category of premises and statutory grounds	*All ages*	*Age group*								
		Under 15	*15*	*16-19*	*20-24*	*25-29*	*30-34*	*35-39*	*40-44*	*45 and over*	*Unknown*
(a) National Health Service											
All grounds	515	13	17	79	123	114	52	83	32	1	1
1 (with any other)	9	—	—	3	1	—	3	2	—	—	—
2 (alone)	154	13	16	54	34	12	13	7	4	1	—
3 (with or without 2)	17	—	—	1	4	2	3	4	3	—	—
4 (alone)	306	—	—	18	77	92	30	68	20	—	1
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	23	—	1	2	6	5	2	2	3	—	—
5	3	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	—
6	3	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
(b) non-National Health Service total											
All grounds	1,517	42	85	631	454	147	70	52	31	4	1
1 (with any other)	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	1,425	41	84	620	424	131	55	42	24	3	1
3 (with or without 2)	87	1	1	9	29	16	14	9	7	1	—
4 (alone)	3	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
non-National Health Service Agency (included in (b) above)											
All grounds	51	3	4	20	17	2	1	2	1	1	—

Category of premises and statutory grounds	Age group										
	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	45	3	4	18	16	1	1	2	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	4	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	1	—
4 (alone)	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 at gestation period 20 weeks and over by statutory grounds, category of premises and age of women residents

England and Wales 1984

Category of premises and statutory grounds	Age group										
	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
(a) National Health Service											
All grounds	6	—	—	1	—	2	1	1	—	1	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	3	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	3	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(b) non-National Health Service total											
All grounds	2,296	45	71	694	785	366	161	100	57	15	2
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	2,246	45	71	693	779	351	151	89	50	15	2
3 (with or without 2)	40	—	—	—	4	14	8	9	5	—	—
4 (alone)	4	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	1	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	6	—	—	1	2	—	—	2	1	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
non-National Health Service Agency (included in (b) above)											
All grounds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 at gestation period 20 weeks and over by statutory grounds, category of premises and age of women residents

England and Wales 1985

Category of premises and statutory grounds	Age group										
	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
(a) National Health Service											
All grounds	496	6	13	83	126	106	55	74	26	5	—
1 (with any other)	13	—	—	1	3	4	2	3	—	—	—
2 (alone)	146	6	14	53	38	14	12	6	2	1	—
3 (with or without 2)	13	—	—	—	8	1	3	1	—	—	—
4 (alone)	297	—	1	27	69	80	35	62	19	4	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	26	—	—	2	8	6	3	2	5	—	—
5	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(b) non-National Health Service total											
All grounds	1,620	39	87	676	508	165	70	46	25	3	1
1 (with any other)	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Category of premises and statutory grounds	Age group										
	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
2 (alone)	1,534	39	87	669	476	134	61	43	22	2	1
3 (with or without 2)	79	—	—	6	28	30	9	3	3	—	—
4 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	5	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	1	—
5	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
non-National Health Service Agency (included in (b) above)											
All grounds	62	4	2	26	19	4	4	—	1	1	1
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	54	4	2	25	17	1	3	—	1	—	1
3 (with or without 2)	7	—	—	1	2	3	1	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 at gestation period 20 weeks and over by statutory grounds, category of premises and age of women non-residents

England and Wales 1985

Category of premises and statutory grounds	Age group										
	All ages	Under 15	15	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45 and over	Unknown
(a) National Health Service											
All grounds	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
(b) non-National Health Service total											
All grounds	2,314	41	90	654	763	360	219	121	58	8	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	2,268	41	90	631	752	353	207	115	31	8	—
3 (with or without 2)	35	—	—	3	8	5	8	5	6	—	—
4 (alone)	2	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	9	—	—	—	3	1	3	1	1	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
non-National Health Service Agency (included in (b) above)											
All grounds	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
1 (with any other)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2 (alone)	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
3 (with or without 2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4 (with any other except 1, excluding 4 alone)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Grounds as listed in Schedule 2 of the Abortion Regulations, 1968:

1. Risk of life of woman.
2. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of woman.
3. Risk of injury to physical or mental health of existing child(ren).
4. Substantial risk of child being born seriously handicapped.
5. In emergency—to save life of woman.
6. In emergency—to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman.

Health Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each health authority in each year since 1979 the total number of hospital beds and the number of acute beds.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 8 December 1986, c. 67]: I regret I cannot provide the hon. Member with all the information he seeks. Figures for all the years requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The available information is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds in NHS hospitals for all specialties and for the acute[1] specialties for years 1979 and 1983.

District Health Authority	*Average daily number of available beds*			
	All specialties		*Acute[1] specialties*	
	1979	*1983*	*1979*	*1983*
Northern Regional Health Authority	25,305·3	23,772·5	10,509·1	9,698·0
Hartlepool	592·3	607·0	359·3	344·1
North Tees	956·1	940·9	468·7	438·2
South Tees	2,282·3	1,902·4	1,418·2	1,095·8
East Cumbria	n/a	1,490·5	n/a	500·5
South Cumbria	n/a	874·1	n/a	411·4
West Cumbria	1,113·1	1,046·9	380·9	330·3
Darlington	1,309·9	1,225·4	397·8	425·1
Durham	1,191·7	1,102·6	505·6	443·2
North West Durham	717·0	611·3	425·9	327·2
South West Durham	1,921·2	1,690·1	295·5	288·2
Northumberland	3,995·8	3,664·3	742·7	668·4
Gateshead	1,368·2	1,365·2	508·1	479·1
Newcastle	3,479·2	3,401·0	2,038·5	2,045·1
North Tyneside	719·0	725·3	436·4	448·3
South Tyneside	770·7	813·4	412·8	385·1
Sunderland	2,426·3	2,312·1	1,155·9	1,068·0
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	29,945·6	26,793·4	11,854·7	11,168·4
Hull	2,145·4	1,933·5	1,058·3	1,038·5
East Yorkshire	2,184·0	1,870·8	635·1	605·4
Grimsby	797·1	957·4	470·5	476·8
Scunthorpe	992·5	932·6	448·3	444·0
Northallerton	437·1	403·9	276·1	239·4
York	n/a	2,377·1	n/a	711·8
Scarborough	688·8	676·3	391·0	371·4
Harrogate	n/a	1,026·9	n/a	532·0
Bradford	2,721·4	2,509·6	1,224·1	1,172·3
Airedale	1,528·2	1,352·6	512·5	451·0
Calderdale	1,370·2	1,227·8	580·0	509·7
Huddersfield	2,625·0	2,058·6	592·0	524·5
Dewsbury	776·8	735·9	408·1	412·1
Leeds Western	n/a	3,156·3	n/a	1,367·2
Leeds Eastern	n/a	2,560·9	n/a	1,260·9
Wakefield	2,606·9	2,128·3	701·9	602·2
Pontefract	853·5	884·9	438·8	449·2
Trent Regional Health Authority	31,711·7	29,390·6	12,197·1	11,664·9
North Derbyshire	1,721·8	1,749·4	589·1	621·6
Southern Derbyshire	4,208·4	3,534·8	1,360·5	1,137·5
Leicestershire	5,140·2	5,045·0	1,849·7	1,852·4
North Lincolnshire	2,814·6	2,100·1	849·2	740·5
South Lincolnshire	1,893·9	1,768·4	647·4	669·5
Bassetlaw	403·0	432·7	240·0	229·1
Central Nottinghamshire	1,997·2	1,794·3	829·3	764·6
Nottingham	4,197·7	3,931·0	1,765·4	1,715·2
Barnsley	962·1	1,134·4	512·5	528·4
Doncaster	n/a	1,879·3	n/a	716·5
Rotherham	n/a	1,250·7	n/a	555·5
Sheffield	5,233·3	4,770·5	2,203·0	2,134·1
East Anglian Regional Health Authority	13,093·6	12,533·7	5,275·5	5,204·4
Cambridge	n/a	1,844·2	n/a	784·6
Peterborough	1,121·7	1,146·1	660·9	626·1
West Suffolk	n/a	1,247·2	n/a	531·0
East Suffolk	n/a	2,476·8	n/a	830·2
Norwich	3,927·5	3,512·4	1,394·9	1,316·3
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	852·2	1,051·0	369·9	465·1
West Norfolk and Wisbech	830·2	847·3	438·2	389·0
Huntingdon	n/a	408·7	n/a	262·1
North West Thames Regional Health Authority[2]	27,904·5	23,816·4	11,287·9	9,052·3
North Bedfordshire	1,232·6	1,204·1	503·4	502·3
South Bedfordshire	1,653·2	1,553·4	468·2	476·4
North Hertfordshire	848·6	841·9	505·8	484·2

District Health Authority	Average daily number of available beds: All specialties 1979	All specialties 1985	Acute[1] specialties 1979	Acute[1] specialties 1985
East Hertfordshire	828·5	713·8	416·4	363·8
North West Hertfordshire	3,288·2	3,175·0	478·1	485·0
South West Hertfordshire	2,384·9	2,060·7	470·9	442·9
Barnet	2,840·7	2,444·8	1,231·6	909·7
Harrow	908·1	904·5	599·2	556·6
Hillingdon	1,627·5	1,378·2	1,232·8	980·5
Hounslow and Spelthorne	n/a	1,381·7	n/a	819·6
Ealing	1,708·9	1,543·4	241·6	372·7
Brent	2,315·9	1,939·0	528·3	456·3
Paddington and North Kensington	1,364·7	1,211·3	1,082·2	902·7
Riverside	5,255·6	3,464·6	2,339·2	1,299·6
North East Thames Regional Health Authority[3]	29,442·8	26,854·1	13,500·6	12,261·6
Basildon and Thurrock	1,892·7	1,945·4	671·2	708·4
Mid Essex	1,281·8	1,429·0	502·3	614·6
North East Essex	3,381·3	2,541·3	924·4	644·6
West Essex	1,256·2	1,192·1	683·5	614·1
Southend	1,937·0	1,792·5	633·6	646·3
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	3,283·2	2,877·9	1,437·0	1,215·6
Hampstead	n/a	1,874·6	n/a	742·3
Bloomsbury	n/a	2,115·8	n/a	1,641·3
Islington	n/a	916·6	n/a	384·8
City and Hackney	n/a	1,754·2	n/a	1,096·2
Newham	940·6	879·8	761·1	523·4
Tower Hamlets	n/a	1,354·7	n/a	856·5
Enfield	1,233·8	1,068·9	678·5	539·2
Haringey	1,235·8	986·4	878·2	636·3
Redbridge	1,654·8	1,616·9	414·7	443·3
Waltham Forest	3,310·7	2,508·0	1,000·7	756·7
South East Thames Regional Health Authority[3]	28,407·9	24,296·6	12,082·8	10,509·8
Brighton	1,896·2	1,704·2	1,183·9	1,032·2
Eastbourne	1,714·4	1,390·2	465·6	447·6
Hastings	1,064·3	901·0	520·6	456·8
South East Kent	1,003·5	1,063·9	549·2	558·9
Canterbury and Thanet	2,925·6	2,375·8	990·2	771·6
Dartford and Gravesham	2,645·8	1,990·2	661·0	365·5
Maidstone	1,740·5	1,563·3	414·7	389·4
Medway	991·2	1,030·3	569·8	598·2
Tunbridge Wells	2,418·6	2,032·7	829·4	775·3
Bexley	1,653·2	1,435·3	391·6	339·2
Greenwich	1,776·9	1,516·6	1,074·1	958·9
Bromley	2,590·8	1,988·9	879·2	676·4
West Lambeth	n/a	1,992·8	n/a	811·9
Camberwell	1,432·3	1,263·7	968·4	854·5
Lewisham and North Southwark	2,335·5	2,047·7	1,703·9	1,273·2
South West Thames Regional Health Authority[3]	26,242·0	22,209·6	8,347·5	7,131·2
North West Surrey	2,138·4	1,721·3	543·6	514·1
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	1,742·8	1,756·6	456·8	465·5
South West Surrey	857·3	902·1	567·3	552·9
Mid Surrey	2,900·6	2,275·0	462·0	411·9
East Surrey	2,775·7	2,170·8	584·1	437·3
Chichester	1,254·8	1,180·3	413·7	409·5
Mid Downs	1,575·9	1,616·5	524·9	562·1
Worthing	933·0	995·9	494·8	519·6
Croydon	3,191·8	2,637·3	648·4	566·2
Kingston and Esher	n/a	1,416·2	n/a	493·3
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	n/a	867·7	n/a	374·5
Wandsworth	2,870·9	2,337·5	1,343·9	1,019·9
Merton and Sutton	2,687·1	2,332·4	954·9	804·4
Wessex Regional Health Authority	19,021·2	17,653·8	7,599·5	7,409·1
East Dorset	2,126·2	2,258·2	1,118·2	1,083·7
West Dorset	1,704·0	1,551·3	457·4	462·1
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	3,057·5	2,751·0	1,142·2	1,129·8
Southampton and South West Hampshire	3,112·4	3,008·6	1,369·7	1,361·8
Winchester	920·9	865·6	413·1	384·7
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	1,633·7	1,458·3	487·8	524·1
Salisbury	999·4	1,035·5	462·7	485·2
Swindon	1,477·6	1,310·8	583·1	519·9
West Wiltshire and Bath	3,043·5	2,680·8	1,254·7	1,156·6
Isle of Wight	946·0	733·7	310·6	301·2

District/Health Authority	Average daily number of available beds: All specialties 1979	All specialties 1985	Acute[1] specialties 1979	Acute[1] specialties 1985
Oxford Regional Health Authority	13,664·4	12,555·1	5,976·4	5,863·4
East Berkshire	1,773·3	1,607·2	948·5	821·7
West Berkshire	2,987·4	2,424·5	1,029·3	930·5
Aylesbury Vale	n/a	1,482·5	n/a	577·3
Wycombe	777·7	741·3	474·6	436·4
Milton Keynes	n/a	458·2	n/a	261·4
Kettering	849·3	935·6	468·8	446·7
Northampton	2,116·2	1,935·8	776·8	768·8
Oxfordshire	3,288·4	2,970·0	1,649·8	1,620·6
South Western Regional Health Authority	24,436·3	21,932·1	8,872·2	8,672·2
Bristol and Weston	2,275·9	2,035·1	1,240·3	1,156·6
Frenchay	2,968·4	2,529·4	567·0	579·0
Southmead	2,175·3	1,687·6	778·8	633·7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2,670·2	2,521·0	772·7	793·3
Exeter	n/a	2,956·9	n/a	971·2
North Devon	604·6	663·8	327·4	332·3
Plymouth	2,241·3	2,166·5	1,040·2	1,063·0
Torbay	n/a	1,161·4	n/a	712·6
Cheltenham	n/a	929·1	n/a	535·5
Gloucester	n/a	2,060·3	n/a	838·3
Somerset	3,477·7	3,219·0	1,015·7	1,036·7
West Midlands Regional Health Authority	36,263·3	33,108·0	14,490·4	13,966·8
Bromsgrove and Redditch	1,226·8	916·5	528·8	366·0
Herefordshire	1,174·2	976·0	493·4	416·7
Kidderminster and District	1,313·0	1,077·9	211·0	221·6
Worcester and District	1,683·6	1,460·7	581·4	554·2
Shropshire	2,602·5	2,448·4	1,228·0	1,201·8
Mid Staffordshire	1,371·9	1,301·0	401·3	426·9
North Staffordshire	3,491·6	3,335·8	1,182·3	1,206·2
South East Staffordshire	1,513·8	1,451·1	394·0	381·5
Rugby	327·1	326·2	207·3	234·5
North Warwickshire	n/a	1,136·1	n/a	318·2
South Warwickshire	n/a	1,755·1	n/a	526·1
Central Birmingham	n/a	1,776·4	n/a	1,155·5
East Birmingham	966·2	960·5	770·3	764·3
North Birmingham	1,879·4	1,493·2	496·4	489·9
South Birmingham	n/a	2,262·1	n/a	953·7
West Birmingham	n/a	2,037·6	n/a	833·2
Coventry	1,871·3	1,885·9	1,018·1	1,033·3
Dudley	1,491·5	1,524·7	846·7	808·6
Sandwell	747·2	882·1	484·3	540·9
Solihull	n/a	1,048·2	n/a	263·4
Walsall	1,761·9	1,567·5	507·3	478·8
Wolverhampton	1,542·6	1,485·0	898·8	801·5
Mersey Regional Health Authority	21,981·5	18,463·9	8,722·1	7,092·2
Chester	2,030·5	1,714·2	348·7	312·7
Crewe	n/a	1,667·8	n/a	525·2
Halton	452·0	396·4	60·0	96·5
Macclesfield	n/a	1,593·2	n/a	366·3
Warrington	2,991·0	2,496·2	481·4	482·3
Liverpool	4,023·7	3,359·0	2,482·6	1,938·3
St. Helens and Knowsley	n/a	2,353·3	n/a	674·9
Southport and Formby	1,323·7	1,170·0	418·7	358·7
South Sefton	1,755·1	1,718·0	1,230·4	1,070·2
Wirral	2,789·4	1,995·8	1,815·4	1,047·1
North Western Regional Health Authority	30,811·5	29,021·0	13,467·0	12,471·5
Lancaster	2,644·8	2,216·7	446·5	432·5
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	1,563·5	1,755·7	858·0	840·8
Preston	n/a	2,172·7	n/a	802·9
Blackburn, Hynburn and Ribble Valley	2,824·6	2,579·3	739·7	786·6
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,591·1	2,399·1	724·1	681·7
West Lancashire	885·5	811·7	604·4	503·0
Chorley and South Ribble	n/a	345·1	n/a	68·5
Bolton	1,360·8	1,245·5	680·5	579·6
Bury	716·2	810·0	396·3	406·4
North Manchester	2,040·8	1,752·2	1,219·1	984·3
Central Manchester	1,136·6	1,272·0	934·6	914·9
South Manchester	2,407·6	2,277·3	1,345·3	1,438·9
Oldham	1,044·9	1,025·6	510·2	456·3
Rochdale	953·1	823·8	550·5	430·4

District Health Authority	Average daily number of available beds: All specialties 1979	All specialties 1985	Acute[1] specialties 1979	Acute[1] specialties 1985
Salford	3,097·6	2,687·6	982·7	925·1
Stockport	1,677·1	1,723·8	868·3	784·2
Tameside and Glossop	868·9	944·9	419·4	448·6
Trafford	835·9	774·7	476·8	370·9
Wigan	1,478·5	1,403·3	640·7	619·9
Directly Administered Hospitals[2]				
The Hospitals for Sick Children	3,418·6	3,086·2	2,861·3	2,302·8
National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	517·4	409·8	511·9	401·8
Moorfields Eye Hospital	356·5	348·7	356·5	337·7
Bethlem and Royal Maudsley Hospitals	207·7	163·1	207·7	163·1
National Heart and Chest Hospitals	471·9	504·2	58·0	56·5
Royal Marsden Hospital	602·9	448·6	602·9	448·6
Hammersmith and Queen Charlottes	360·7	343·7	360·7	343·7
Eastman Dental Hospital	277·3	968·1	139·6	551·4
	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
England	361,670·2	325,487·0	147,044·1	134,468·6

[1]Acute is all specialties less geriatrics, younger disabled, GP maternity, obstetrics, mental handicap and mental illness.
[2]Figures for 1979 not comparable with those given for 1985 because of NHS restructuring on 1 April 1982.
n.a Comparable figures for 1979 not readily available because of NHS restructuring on 1 April 1982 or because of subsequent inter DHA movement of hospitals.

Advisory Committees

Sir Philip Holland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* all advisory committees to which he make appointments and which have not been listed in the annual public bodies publication of the Management and Personnel Office; and which have been abolished since the beginning of 1982;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* all advisory committees to which he makes appointments which are not listed in the annual public bodies publication by the Management and Personnel Office of the Cabinet Office.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 9 December 1986, c. *125-26*]: I regret that HM(71)49—"Review of the safe handling of foul and infected laundry" was omitted from table 1 in my previous reply.

Sir Philip Holland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, what is the status of the 25 expert advisory committees listed in columns 587 and 588 of the *Official Report* for 16 May but not listed in the replies to the hon. Member for Gedling on 9 December.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 15 December 1986 c. *420*]:

The information requested is as follows:

Advisory Committees Classified as Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Listed in the Annual Publication "Public Bodies"

Title	Number of Meetings April 1985-April 1986	Normal Number of Meetings Per Year
1. Advisory Committee on Dialysis Equipment	0	As and when required
2. Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens	4	4
3. Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation and the Environment	3	4
4. Medical Advisory Committee	11	11

Note.—My right hon. Friend shares joint responsibility with my noble Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment, in respect of appointments to the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens and the Medical Advisory Committee. These Committees appear in "Public Bodies under the entry for the Department of Employment but not under the entry for this Department. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation and the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Dialysis are listed in "Public Bodies 1986 which has just been published and will be available in the library.

Departmental Committees and Working Groups

Title	Number of Meetings April 1985-April 1986	Normal Number of Meetings Per Year
1. Central Manpower Committee (Medical and Dental	1	1
2. Committee on Research into Behavioural Aspects of Smoking and Health	3	2
3. Hospital Building Joint Liaison Committee	0	As and when required
4. Information Advisory Group	5	11
5. Overseas Doctors Study Group	2	2
6. Working Party on Project Cost Data Banks	Wound up	
7. Building and Engineering Research and Development Committee	1	3
8. Children's Research Liaison Group (Care)	1	4
9. Children's Research Liaison Group (Health)	1	As and when required
10. Elderly Research Liaison Group	1	2
11. Forensic Psychiatry Liaison Group	0	1
12. Homelessness and Addictions Research Liaison Group	1	2
13. Local Authority Social Services Research Liaison Group	3	3-4
14. Mental Handicap Research Liaison Group	4	4
15. Mental Illness Research Liaison Group	3	3
16. Nursing Research Liaison Group	2	3
17. Physical Disablement Research Liaison Group	1	2
18. Small Grants Committee (Now wound up)	4	4

Title	Number of Meetings April 1985-April 1986	Normal Number of Meetings Per Year
19. Social Security Research Policy Committee	0	2
20. Supply Research Liaison Group	1	2

Note.—Committees 1-6 are departmental committees set up by administrative action and consist principally of officials and employees of the National Health Service. 7-20 are research liaison groups falling within the ambit of the chief scientist's office.

Benefits

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the London borough of Newham have been in receipt of *(a)* supplementary benefit, *(b)* housing benefit in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January, c. *176*]:

(a) Supplementary Benefit

Information is not available in the precise form requested. The London borough of Newham is covered by the Department's offices at Canning Town, Plaistow and Woodgrange Park. The number of people receiving supplementary benefit from these offices on 16 December 1986 (the latest available information) and on similar dates in 1982 (earlier information is not available) to 1985 is as follows:

London Borough of Newham

December	Numbers
1982	26,333
1983	27,767
1984	29,970
1985	31,464
1986	33,836

(b) Housing Benefit

The number of people who were in receipt of housing benefit or rebates or allowances under the former Department of the Environment schemes in the London borough of Newham is as follows:

Year	Rent rebate recipients	Rent allowance recipients	Rate rebate recipients
1979-80	4,583	1,663	10,253
1980-81	4,600	1,632	11,369
1981-82	5,883	1,825	14,033
1982-83	6,800	1,758	13,741
1983-84[1]	18,304	6,709	34,216
1984-85	18,858	8,009	34,270
1985-86	18,573	7,727	34,699
1986-87[2]	18,642	7,500	34,249

Source: CIPFA Housing Rent Statistics and Local Authority subsidy returns.

[1] The Housing Benefit Scheme, which replaced the Rent and Rate Rebate Scheme, was partially introduced in November 1982 and fully implemented from April 1983.

[2] The figures for 1986-87 are estimated and are subject to revision.

DEFENCE

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide for the most recent date for which he has information *(a)* the strength of forces stationed at RAF Greenham common, *(b)* the acreage of the base and *(c)* the annual budget.

Mr. Stanley: Some 2,000 USAF service personnel are currently stationed at RAF Greenham common. There are also approximately 300 Ministry of Defence personnel at the base comprising both RAF personnel and MOD police.

The base occupies approximately 1,100 acres and the annual cost to the United Kingdom is about £6 million.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide for the most recent date for which he has information *(a)* the strength of forces stationed at Diego Garcia, *(b)* the acreage of the base, and *(c)* the annual budget.

Mr. Stanley: The United Kingdom maintains a naval party of 39 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel on Diego Garcia at a total cost of around £1 million a year. United States service men and women on the island totalled 1,733 at the end of December 1986. The total area of the Diego Garcia atoll, which has been set aside for the defence purposes of the United Kindom and United States Governments, is some 11,000 acres. Construction of the island's defence facilities has however been confined within a specified area on the western side.

Royal Arsenal

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the future location of the headquarters of the directorate of defence quality assurance was first considered; what factors led to a decision that it should remain at Woolwich; and why the issue has once again been re-opened;

(2) what is the estimated cost of retaining the headquarters of the directorate of defence quality assurance at Woolwich and Bromley compared to moving it to a new site outside south-east England;

(3) how many schemes for the rationalisation and reorganisation of the Royal Arsenal site at Woolwich have been considered since 1974.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since 1974, the future of the Royal Arsenal has been the subject of a number of studies with terms of reference of varying width. An important step in 1979 was the integration of the quality assurance directorate (fighting vehicles and engineering equipment) with quality assurance directorate (weapons) to form quality assurance directorate (ordnance). That establishment sponsored a further, broader based, rationalisation study which led in 1982-83 to the production of a Woolwich development plan. On the formation of the directorate general of defence quality assurance in 1984, this plan was taken into account in further studies aimed at achieving a rationalisation of accommodation for the whole organisation. Recommendations have been made that Royal Arsenal west is the preferred existing QA location capable of housing the main units of the new organisation, but other locations outside south-east England have to be taken into account before an investment programme of this scale is undertaken. The further appraisal is not yet completed and comparative costing information is therefore not available.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the annual running costs of the Royal Arsenal site, Woolwich, over each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current annual cash expenditure by the directorate general of defence quality assurance as site landlord is about £4·7 million. Figures for the 10 earlier years are not readily available.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the various units now based at the Royal Arsenal site at Woolwich, indicating the numbers of employees at each.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The units presently based at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich and the numbers of their employees are as follows:

	Number of employees
MOD Units	
Army Cataloguing Authority	74
Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance	1,268
Naval Publications Store	96
Air Publications and Forms Store	113
RAF Movements Unit (London)	34
RAF Signals Unit	219
Ministry of Defence Police	68
Non-MOD Units	
Books Supply Department (British Library)	52
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Stores	52
National Maritime Museum	6
Civil Service Catering Organisation	12
Property Services Agency (Department of the Environment)	63

Military Convoy (Accident)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence when and where an accident to a military convoy took place in Wiltshire on 10 January; what were the points of departure and destination of and the route taken by the convoy; what vehicles were involved; what materials were being carried; on whose orders the convoy was sent; whether the police were consulted before departure; when the police were informed of the incident; when police arrived on the scene; under what authority armed troops cordoned off areas before their arrival; what area was cordoned off; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: A military convoy was involved in a road traffic accident near West Dean in Wiltshire on Saturday, 10 January. It was operating under Ministry of Defence command and control procedures.

I understand that the police were informed immediately of the incident; and that the first police officers arrived at the scene within about five minutes. Traffic diversions were established by the police. In addition, Ministry of Defence personnel assisted the police in restricting access to the area immediately around the accident site to ensure the security of the cargo and to allow recovery operations to continue unhindered. For security reasons, it is not our practice to discuss the make-up of military convoys or the materials carried, or to disclose their routes.

Weapons (Research and Development)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on research into, and development of *(a)* the Spearfish; *(b)* Stingray, *(c)* Tigerfish and *(d)* Stonefish projects in each year since their inception; and what proportion of defence research and development have they represented during that period.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Spearfish Weapons System

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Spearfish weapons system is a dual-capable system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is assumed that the question refers to the capability of firing Spearfish against both submarine and surface ship targets. I can confirm that Spearfish has been designed and is currently being developed to have both these capabilities.

Research and Development

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what degree he can identify regional distribution of his Department's expenditure on research and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The regional distribution of Ministry of Defence expenditure on research and development is not separately identified. For estimates of the percentages of total procurement expenditure spent in various regions, I refer the hon. Member to an answer given on 18 December last to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) at columns 689-90. These estimates refer to direct payments to main contractors and do not take account of payments made to sub-contractors.

Underwater Weapons Systems (Sales)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the value of sales of underwater weapons systems by the United Kingdom to other Governments in each year since 1979; if he will list the countries to which there have been such sales; and which systems have been sold to those countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the consistent policy of successive Governments not to disclose particulars of defence sales business with other countries, as these are matters of commercial confidentiality.

Torpedo Weapon Systems

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the specific importance of *(a)* Spearfish, *(b)* Stingray. *(c)* Tigerfish and *(d)* Stonefish weapons to the defences of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Tigerfish and Stingray are important elements in the maritime layered defence of the United Kingdom and its assets.

It is planned that Spearfish will enhance this capability by keeping pace with Soviet technological advances, when it replaces Tigerfish in the inventory. Stonefish is not in service with the United Kingdom armed forces.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions he has issued to the meteorological office

at Bracknell regarding the withholding of information about temperatures; when the instructions were issued; and if he will place a copy of the instructions in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No instructions have been issued to the meteorological office regarding the withholding of temperature or any other meteorological data. On the contrary, such information is readily available from the office's headquarters at Bracknell and from our various weather centres, subject only to the availability of staff to assemble it and the need to recover a measure of the cost of providing it.

Electromagnetic Pulse

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made with regard to the vulnerability of the United Kingdom's early warning systems to the effects of electromagnetic pulse from a nuclear weapon exploding in the atmosphere above the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: The requirements for electromagnetic pulse protection have been and will continue to be assessed in relation to both existing and future early warning systems for the United Kingdom. It would not be in the public interest to provide details.

Polaris Submarines (VLF Link)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in the event of the United Kingdom's fixed VLF transmitters being destroyed, the back-up mobile VLF transmitters can provide a guaranteed communication link with the Polaris submarines.

Mr. Stanley: We are entirely satisfied with the plans for the command and control of our strategic deterrent forces in all circumstances.

Pindar and Hawthorn

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment his Department has made as to the survivability of the new bunker control centre, code-named Pindar, if subjected to nuclear ballistic missile attack;

(2) what assessment his Department has made as to the survivability of the Hawthorn underground complex if subjected to nuclear ballistic missile attack.

Mr. Stanley: It would not be in the public interest to comment on matters of this nature.

Ballistic Missile Attack (Warning System)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence how long it would take for the ballistic missile early warning system sites to confirm a ballistic missile attack on the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: Warning time depends on the range, launching point and tragectory of the missile. We believe the time would vary from four to 10 minutes, depending on these factors.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what early warning capability the United Kingdom possesses to detect an attack on the United Kingdom by submarine-launched ballistic missiles from the Arctic ocean region.

Mr. Stanley: An attack on the United Kingdom by ballistic missiles launched from submarines patrolling in the Arctic ocean region would be detected by the BMEWS radars at RAF Fylingdales.

Fylingdales

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions, and for how long on those occasions, the ballistic missile early warning system site at Fylingdales has been out of operation during the past five years.

Mr. Stanley: It would not be in the public interest to give specific details of the operational availability of the ballistic missile early warning system at Fylingdales, but it has proved exceptionally reliable. It has been out of operation for less than three hours in total over the last five years.

Soviet Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the shortest flight time in which a Soviet ballistic missile could reach the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: The shortest flight time in which a Soviet ballistic missile could reach the United Kingdom is about 10 minutes.

AWACS

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what capability the airborne warning and control system planes have with regard to the detection, tracking and warning of cruise missile attack.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: AWACS has a wide-ranging capability to detect and provide warning of aircraft and missile attacks. Details of its operational performance are, however, classified.

Type 23 Frigate (Command and Control System)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when work on the Ferranti command and control system for the type 23 frigate was abandoned; for how long research went on; and how much money has been spent;

(2) what is the timetable for the completion of the replacement for the command and control system for the type 23 frigate;

(3) what steps have been taken to find a replacement for the command and control system for the type 23 frigate; and which companies are involved in the final round of tendering.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work on the Ferranti command and control system for the type 23 frigate has been under way since the early 1980s, and is continuing. The system is planned for operation from the 1990s.

In line with our policy of introducing competition in procurement, it has recently been decided that development and production work on the system will be put out to competitive tender. Invitations to tender have recently been issued. Following evaluation of these bids, consideration may need to be given to a final round of tendering and in any case one option will be to continue with the present work but under new terms.

It is not the practice to publicise project costs which are commercially confidential between the Ministry of Defence and individual contractors.

Cyprus

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance is issued by the authorities of the sovereign base areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus to individuals or companies resident in or visiting the base concerning the legal jurisdiction of the sovereign base areas.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his answer*, 19 December 1986, c. 777]: All British service and civilian personnel posted to Cyprus receive written guidance on the relevant provisions of local law in the sovereign base areas and the Republic of Cyprus. In respect of service personnel, this written guidance is reinforced by oral briefing. The sovereign base areas administration does not issue guidance concerning the legal jurisdiction of the sovereign base areas to others resident and/or working there but copies of the sovereign base areas laws and the treaty of establishment are freely available in public reference libraries in the sovereign base areas.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 20 January 1987

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Taiwanese Goods

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is *(a)* the value of exports of Taiwanese goods during the last complete year and *(b)* the value of imports from that country.

Mr. Alan Clark: According to Taiwan statistics their total exports in 1985 amounted to United States $31·4 billion of which United States $0·7 billion went to the United Kingdom.

In the same year, the United Kingdom recorded imports of £583 million (United States $755 million) from Taiwan.

Origin Marking

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy that goods bearing a United Kingdom name or mark must continue to be marked with their country of origin.

Mr. Howard: For the reasons set out in my reply of 1 December 1986 at columns 434-35 to my hon. Friend, the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), it is not possible to maintain the present requirements of the Trade Descriptions Act 1972. It does, however, remain the Government's policy that consumers should be protected against being misled about the origin of goods and my Department is currently consulting interested parties on the scope for supplementing the protection afforded by the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the level of manufacturing investment in each year since 1979 expressed as a percentage of the 1979 level.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested is:

Manufacturing Investment (Including Leased Assets)

Year	*Percentage of 1979 level at 1980 prices*
1980	89
1981	69
1982	68
1983	68
1984	80
1985	85
[1]1986	83

[1] Fourth quarter estimated.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the level of manufacturing output in each year since 1979 expressed as a percentage of the 1979 level.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested is given in the table:

Index of output of the manufacturing industries (1979 = 100)

	Percentage
1979	100·0
1980	91·3
1981	85·8
1982	86·0
1983	88·5
1984	92·0
1985	94·9
1986[1]	95·1

[1] 1986 figure is the average of the first eleven months of the year.

Company Sequestrations

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms in Dundee have gone into sequestration since 1979.

Mr. Howard: From 1979 to 1986 inclusive there were 42 sequestrations in Dundee. The figure covers all individuals and partnerships. A separate figure in respect of firms is not available. Included are cases relating to persons with businesses in Dundee but living outside.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the amount of the net borrowings of Rolls-Royce plc at 31 December 1986 which the Government intend to subscribe in new ordinary shares as indicated in his answer to the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) on 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, columns *607-8*.

Mr. John Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *608*, he will give the net borrowings of Rolls-Royce as at 31 December 1986.

Mr. Pattie: The figure concerned will not be available until the company's results have been audited and then approved by the directors. This is unlikely to be before the middle of March.

Electrical Safety (Regulations)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date he now anticipates the draft regulations concerning the safety of domestic electrical plugs and sockets will come into effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The House may recall that in response to a similar question in July of last year from the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) I said that we intended to submit the draft plug and socket regulations to Parliament during the early part of this Session. This is still our intention. However, following further consultation with the electrical industry, it has been agreed that there is a need to allow a longer period for implementation of certain provisions than I then indicated.

In these circumstances and subject to the approval of Parliament the revised timetable for the implementation of the proposed plug and socket regulations is as follows:

1 September 1987: For manufacturers and importers (first suppliers): plugs (other than standard 13 amp), sockets and adaptors covered by the regulations must comply with the relevant British Standard or be approved by a specified person. Standard 13 amp plugs must comply with British Standard 1363: 1984 including Amendments 1 and 2, or provide an equivalent level of safety.

1 March 1988: For manufacturers, importers, wholesalers and retailers: plugs (other than standard 13 amp), sockets and adaptors must comply with the relevant British Standard or be approved by a specified person. Standard 13 amp plugs must comply with British Standard 1363: 1984 including Amendments 1 and 2, or provide an equivalent level of safety.

1 September 1988: Standard 13 amp plugs must be approved by a specified person.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Office of Fair Trading last investigated petrol prices; and when it next intends to do so.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. 259]: The Director General of Fair Trading continues to monitor the petrol market following the 1965 and 1979 Monopolies and Mergers Commission monopoly reports on the supply of petrol.

Share Issues (Multiple Applications)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations have been conducted into multiple applications for shares during the public sale of nationalised industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have been asked to reply.

Investigations into suspected multiple applications are made by the receiving banks appointed to process applications in Government share sales and, in certain large sales, by specially appointed firms of auditors. Where appropriate, suspected cases are referred by the Department responsible for the sale to the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

There have been 10 successful prosecutions for multiple applications regarding the British Telecom sale. As far as the British Gas sale is concerned, Touche Ross have submitted an interim report on suspected multiple applications to the Department of Energy; investigations also involving the DPP and the Fraud Squad are continuing.

TRANSPORT

National Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects on the competitive structure of the ports industry of the national dock labour scheme.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Ports to which the dock labour scheme applies suffer the disadvantages of its rigidities and cost, and some of them have had a poor industrial relations record. The growth in recent years of ports outside the scheme must in part reflect these factors. However, it would be very difficult to assess the effect of the scheme, as opposed to other relevant factors, on the comparative competitiveness of our ports.

Remould Tyres

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to provide for departmental powers to control the design and manufacture of remould tyres.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend already has powers to lay down safety requirements for vehicle components before they are put on the market. Under the Motor Vehicle Tyres (Safety) Regulations, 1984, retreaded tyres must be manufactured so as to meet British Standard BS Au 144b.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he is proposing to hold with local authorities and other interested parties about the possibility of closing the Severn bridge for repairs and maintenance at certain times during the summer months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no plans to close the bridge for repairs and maintenance during the summer months. Closures of one or both carriageways may be necessary on a few occasions during the major strengthening works, but these are planned for the winter at night times over weekends. The strengthening contract will stipulate strict conditions about lane closures and none will be permited at peak times.

The traffic management strategy during the above works has been discussed in principle by the Severn crossing consultative committee and in detail by the traffic management liaison committee, on both of which local highway and police authorities, users organisations and the industry are represented at official level. These committees will continue to meet regularly to discuss future developments.

In the event of unexpected delays due to planned works, or to unplanned incidents such as high winds and accidents, a strategy for the diversion of traffic on the English side has also been agreed with the police and the local authorities. This strategy will be implemented before the main strengthening work starts. Similar arrangements already operate on the Welsh side of the crossing.

Advance notice and publicity will be given to all planned traffic restrictions, and up-to-date information will be made available to motorists at all times.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce legislation to provide for the refund of vehicle excise duty when proof exists that a vehicle was incapable of being used but where the licence disc is not available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. Legislation is not required, since present statutory and administrative arrangements already provide for refunds of vehicle excise duty to be considered where the licence disc is not available. Whether or not the vehicle is capable of use is not normally a consideration.

Smoking (Road Accidents)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Secretary of State for Transport what medical evidence has now emerged to indicate a correlation between smoking while driving and an increased accident rate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None that I am aware of. Our advice remains that if drivers must smoke they should only do so if they can be sure that their ability to concentrate will not at any time be affected.

Greater Manchester PTA (Correspondence)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will be replying to the letter sent by the clerk to the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority on 24 December last, under the heading "Precept Limitation—Total Expenditure"; what action he is taking; if he will place copies of the correspondence in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have placed copies of the correspondence in the Library.

Modbury-Bigbury Road (Census)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria were used in the selection of the Modbury to Bigbury road as a core census site.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Modbury to Bigbury road site was selected (along with six others) at random from all points on class B built-up roads in Great Britain.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport for how long each day, for how many days in each month, and for how many years, a census site will be maintained on the Modbury to Bigbury road; how much of the traffic so counted is estimated to be travelling by road beyond Bigbury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The traffic census on the Modbury to Bigbury road is taken for three 16-hour periods each month. Vehicles are not stopped, nor do interviews take place. Manual traffic counts will continue until the Department is able to install suitable automatic traffic counting and classifying equipment. Development of such equipment is in hand and undergoing trials. It is not possible to estimate from traffic counts alone the proportion of traffic using the road beyond Bigbury.

Inflation (Transport Policies)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on the rate of inflation of current Government policies on public passenger transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government's policies on public passenger transport are aimed at greater efficiency, cost effectiveness and increased competition. They will therefore generally lead to lower costs than would otherwise be the case, to the benefit of passengers, ratepayers or taxpayers, or a combination of these.

Roads

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those road schemes, for which he has issued contracts, but which are either incomplete, or have not begun, showing the cost of each scheme.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to the reply*, 10 December 1986, c. *153-4*]: I regret that certain errors were contained in that answer. The list should be corrected as follows:

Route	*Title*	*Works cost estimate £ million*
Delete		
A36	Warminster Bypass	9·1
Add		
A27	Fontwell Bypass	3·4
A419	Blundsdon-Cricklade Dualling	1·8
A650	Victoria Park to Crossflatts	10·3

The corrected list for schemes costing more than £1 million is:

Route	*Title*	*Works cost estimate £ million*
A1	Baldersby Junction Improvement	2·5
A1	Clifton to Stannington Bridge	4·8
A1	Wetherby Bypass	9·7
A10	Buntingford Bypass	4·0
A11	Wymondham to Cringleford	8·3
A12	Martlesham Bypass	9·1
A19	Ricall and Barlby Bypass	5·2
A1M	Hatfield Tunnel Electrical and Mechanical Works	7·3
A2	Barham Crossroads Grade Separated Junction	2·5
A2	London Boundary to M2 Improvement	1·4
A20	Sidcup Bypass Main Contract	32·1
A21	Pembury Bypass	12·9
A27	Fontwell Bypass	3·4
A27	Havant to Chichester Bypass	33·1
A30	Exeter to Okehampton Stage 3	15·0
A30	Okehampton Bypass	17·0
A303	Furze Hedge Improvement	1·2
A303	South Petherton to Broadway	14·1
A303	Thruxton to Amesbury	10·0
A34	East Ilsey to Chilton Improvement	4·0
A35	Bridport Link Road	3·4
A38	Belvedere Cross	1·3
A38	Saltash Bypass	9·6
A39	Bideford Bypass	16·0
A406	South Woodford to Barking Ancillary Works	10·7
A406	South Woodford to Barking Contract 1	11·4
A406	South Woodford to Barking Contract 2	22·1
A406	South Woodford to Barking Contract 3	18·6
A406	South Woodford to Barking Contract 4	12·4
A419	Blunsdon-Cricklade Dualling	1·8
A422	Stratford Northern Bypass	12·3
A43	Brackley Bypass	10·0
A43	Towcester Bypass	6·3
A435	Evesham Bypass	7·7
A47	Peterborough, Westwood Junction	1·5
A47	Peterborough, Longthorpe Junction	1·2
A47	Wardley Hill Improvement	1·7
A48	Chepstow Bridge	4·8
A483	Chester Southern Bypass to Welsh Border	6·6
A483	Oswestry Bypass and A5 Improvements	17·4
A52	Barthomley Link to M6	6·6
A595	Thursey Bypass	1·3
A6	Chapel-en-le-Frith Bypass	27·7

Route	Title	Works cost estimate £ million
A616	Stocksbridge to M1	17·5
A629	Kildwick to Beechcliffe	22·7
A64	Seamer/Crossgates Bypass	5·0
A65	Settle to Giggleswick Bypass	5·5
A650	Victoria Park to Crossflatts	10·3
A69	Eighton Lodge Junction Improvement	4·0
A69	Newcastle Western Bypass Advance Works	8·0
M5	Rashwood to Catshill	22·3
M5	Warndon to Catshill Ancillary Works	9·1
M5	Warndon to Rashwood	16·6
M5/M42	M42 and M5 Contract 1	4·8
M63	Stretford to Eccles Improvement Stages 1 and 2	18·8
M63	Stretford to Eccles Improvement Stage 3	2·5
M63/M66	Portwood to Denton	55·5

Note:
The works cost estimates shown above are estimates of total scheme costs in cash terms and in most cases include some non-contract items such as statutory undertakers' fees and other ancillary works items. In the case of some larger schemes, ancillary items are the subject of a separate works contract.

PRIME MINISTER

Pensioners

Q9. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister when she next proposes to meet representatives of pensioner organisations.

The Prime Minister: I am meeting a delegation from the eighth national pensioners convention on 5 March.

EC (Expenditure)

Q48. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the question of the anticipated expenditure of the European Economic Community in 1987 in comparison with its legal limits of expenditure; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We shall make clear in every appropriate forum that the Community should contain its expenditure within the legal limits.

State Security

Q94. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if she will refer to the Security Commission the matter of the documents relating to national security allegedly bequeathed by the late Anthony Blunt to his brother and held in an institution in London.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to my statement on Mr. Blunt of 21 November 1979, columns 402-10.

Engagements

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Stern asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Lloyd asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Prime Minister if she will publish a table showing forecast spending, at 1986 prices, on regional development grants in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales in each year from now until 1989-90; and if she will publish the figures for spending on regional development grants, at 1986 prices, for each year from 1979-80 for England, Scotland and Wales.

The Prime Minister [*pursuant to her reply*, 19 January 1987]: The future provision for expenditure on regional development grants incorporated in the Public Expenditure White Paper, adjusted to 1986 prices[1], is as follows:

£ million

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
England	93·3	82·8	89·3
Scotland	63·8	53·4	58·1
Wales	30·5	24·8	24·1
TOTAL	187·6	161·0	171·5

Payments of Regional Development Grants for the years since 1979-80, adjusted to 1986 prices[1], were as follows:

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*[2]1986-87*
England	345·6	379·6	444·7	330·5	252·4	226·1	169·4	191·8
Scotland	115·5	157·1	180·4	338·4	161·3	118·1	109·4	133·8
Wales	83·4	143·5	154·4	143·1	81·4	100·2	85·9	70·8
TOTAL	544·5	680·2	779·5	812·0	495·1	444·4	364·7	396·4

Notes:
[1] Expenditure on a 1986 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.
[2] 1986-87 data are provisional and for the first three quarters of the year only.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephone Directory

Mr. Higgins asked the Lord Privy Seal why the numerous changes in ministerial telephone numbers were not notified to those responsible for producing the House of Commons telephone directory, so that a new directory could be issued before the changes were made; what Government Department is responsible for such matters; if he will estimate how many man hours have been wasted as a result of this information not being available in a convenient form; and when a directory with the new numbers is now likely to be available.

Mr. Biffen: Each Government Department is responsible for its own arrangements to notify callers when ministerial telephone numbers are changed. The December 1986 issue of the Palace of Westminster telephone directory was submitted for printing in early November at which time no information on the future changes of some ministerial numbers was available.

It is not possible to state how many man-hours have been wasted on account of the lack of information on revised telephone numbers. The Palace of Westminster operators now have an updated list of ministerial telephone numbers shown in the Palace directory and hon. Members may obtain this information by dialling 100. Amended Palace of Westminster directories are produced three times a year; the next issue will be made in April 1987.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Communities (Own Resources Payment)

Mr. Rowe asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the early payment of non-value added tax own resources to the European Communities in January.

Mr. Brooke: In accordance with article 10(2) of Council Regulation 2891/77, the Commission has requested member states to advance from February the payment of own resources other than VAT in respect of agricultural, sugar and isoglucose levies and customs duties collected by the Government on its behalf.

The Government will accordingly make an advance payment today of some £138 million, in accorance with the European Court of Justice's ruling on 18 December that these requests impose an obligation on member states to comply with them. As I informed the House on 19 December at column 746, the payment will be made from the Consolidated Fund under the terms of section 2(3) of the European Communities Act, 1972. The payment of levies and duties on 20 February will be reduced by the amount of the advance. There will, therefore, be no net addition to forecast public expenditure for 1986-87.

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means he proposes to inform the House of a payment of own resources made in advance at the demand of the European Commission, following the decision of the European Court of Justice in case 93/85; and whether the House will be given the opportunity of expressing an opinion on the circumstances which have given rise to the need for the advancing of payments before the transfer is made.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 January 1987]: The Government propose to inform the House by means of a parliamentary answer whenever advance payments of levies and duties are made. It will not normally, I fear, be practicable to arrange for the House to debate the surrounding circumstances before such advances are made since requests are usually made at short notice. They arise from temporary cash flow problems and do not involve any increase in public expenditure. Nevertheless, the House will continue to have the opportunity to discuss advance payments and the general financial position in the context of the Government's regular reports and statements to Parliament on Community budgetary matters.

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, since the decision of the European Court of Justice in case 93/85 is contrary to the Government's contention that advance payments of own resources to the European Commission require specific parliamentary approval, the United Kingdom intends to propose in the Council of Ministers the amendment or annulment of articles 10 and 11 of Council Regulation 1891/77, so far as they involve an absolute liability to make such payments and impose a penalty for late compliance.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 January 1987]: The Government have no plans to make such a proposal. There would, in any case, be no prospect of obtaining agreement to it.

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he had made of the extent to which current cash flow problems of the Community are likely to give rise to demands for advance payments of own resources in the present European Community budgetary year.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 January 1987]: It is the Government's view that the European Commission's cash flow difficulties are such that it may be required to request advance payments of non-VAT own resources from member states for at least the first quarter of 1987. We have recently received such a request for the advance of February's payment to January. Our assessment is reflected in the public expenditure plans, published in the public expenditure White Paper (Cm 56-II, section 3.3, net payments to European Community Institutions, pages 68-71) on 14 January, in which it is assumed that some £130 million will be drawn forward from 1987-88 to 1986-87.

Arts (Donations)

Mr. Soames asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will summarise in the *Official Report* what steps he has taken to facilitate the giving of corporate and personal donations to support the arts.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Since 1979 the Government have made very substantial improvements to the tax reliefs for corporate and personal donations to charities, including arts charities. These are as follows:

1980 Budget

Reduction of minimum period for charitable covenants for tax relief from seven to four years.

Introduction of higher rate income tax relief for charitable covenants, originally with £3,000 limit.

1982 Budget

Exemption from stamp duty on charitable covenants and on conveyances and transfers of property of all kinds to a charity.

1983 Budget

Removal of limit for CTT exemption for gifts to charities within one year of death.

Introduction of tax relief for an employee's salary costs met by a company during period of secondment to charity.

Limit on higher rate income tax relief for charitable covenants increased to £5,000.

1984 Budget

Tax relief for an employee's salary costs met by an unincorporated employer during period of secondment to charity.

1985 Budget

Limit on higher rate income tax relief for charitable covenants increased to £10,000.

1986 Budget

Limit on higher rate relief for charitable covenants abolished.

Income tax relief introduced from April 1987 for charitable donations made by direct deductions from wages and salaries under approved payroll giving schemes.

Corporation tax relief introduced for single donations by companies (other than close companies) to charities, up to a maximum of 3 per cent. of dividends paid by company in relevant accounting year.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the items of baby equipment upon which value added tax is imposed; and what is the percentage value added tax applied in each case.

Mr. Brooke: All items of baby equipment, other than clothing and footwear, are liable to value added tax at the standard rate (15 per cent.).

Channel Fixed Link

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether French customs and excise officials will undertake on-train customs inspection for *(a)* passengers and *(b)* freight using the Channel fixed link; and whether they will travel further than Ashford.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Incomes

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing tax and national insurance contributions less child benefit, where appropriate, for 1986-87, and comparable figures for 1985-86 and 1978-79, with the multiples of average earnings as half, two-thirds, one, five and 10 times for *(a)* a married couple, with part-time working spouse, *(b)* a married couple plus two children, with part-time working spouse and *(c)* a single person;

(2) if he will detail the proportions of pre- and post-tax increases paid to the top 1 per cent., 2 per cent., 3 per cent., 4 per cent., 5 per cent., 10 per cent., 20 per cent., 30 per cent., 50 per cent., and 75 per cent. of taxpayers in 1978-79 and the latest available year; and what this represents in money terms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

EC Budget

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the most up to date figures for the United Kingdom contribution to the European Economic Commission budget in each year from 1975 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1986 prices.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987]: The figures requested are set out in the table herewith.

£ million

Year	*Cash* [1]	*Constant 1986 prices* [2]
1975	−56	−161
1976	167	417
1977	369	810
1978	822	1,620
1979	947	1,630
1980	706	1,014
1981	397	511
1982	606	725
1983	647	737
1984	656	718
1985	1,808	[3] 1,865
1986 [5]	326	[4] 326

[1] United Kingdom figures showing payments to the Community budget on a cash flow basis. Budget refunds and abatements are credited to the year in which they are paid.

[2] Constant price figures have been constructed using the GDP deflator.

[3] The 1985 budget contained a flat rate VAT abatement for the United Kingdom of 1,000 mecu (£605 million), payable in respect of the United Kingdom's contribution in 1984. £166 million of this was received by the end of December 1985. The balance, £439 million, was received in the first few days of January 1986. The delay in payment reduced the 1986 figure and increased that for 1985.

[4] The 1986 net contribution is the estimate contained in the Statement on the 1986 Community Budget (Cmnd. 9907) published in October 1986.

[5] Estimated.

ENVIRONMENT

London Docklands

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many existing homes and homes under construction within the area of the London docklands are *(a)* in or intended for owner-occupation, *(b)* held by local authorities for letting, *(c)* held by housing associations for letting, *(d)* held privately for letting and *(e)* held for shared ownership schemes.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table:

Number of existing homes and homes under construction as at 31 March 1986

Description	*Number*
Owner-occupation	8,578
Local authority lettings	12,840
Housing association lettings	1,527
Private letting	[1]978
Shared ownership	321
TOTAL	24,244

[1] 1981 census figure.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current estimated population of the London docklands.

Mr. John Patten: The estimated population of the London docklands urban development area at 31 March 1986 was about 42,800.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* for each local authority in England (i) the number of unfit dwellings, (ii) the number of dwellings fit but lacking basic amenities, (iii) the number of non sub-standard dwellings in need of renovation, (iv) the number of difficult to let dwellings, and (v) the total number of dwellings as indicated in form HIP1 submitted with their housing investment programme bid for 1987-88.

Mr. Tracey: The information, which relates to April 1986, is listed in the "HIP1 (1986) all items print" which is available in the Library. The numbers reported are not necessarily comparable as authorities' criteria may differ.

Entry and Search Powers

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials for whom he has responsibility currently have the power to enter and search premises, subject to statutory conditions; and, in each case, if he will indicate the statutory authority under which power is exercised.

Mr. Ridley: I may authorise persons to enter and in some cases inspect, but not search, premises under section 6(9) and section 7(6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, under section 1(10) and section 7(3) of the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 as amended by the Wildlife and Countryside Act and under Regulations 4(3) and 5(2) of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1985 (SI No. 1155). There are 105 wildlife inspectors who work on a casual, fee-paid, basis and are authorised under these powers.

Her Majesty's radiochemical inspectors has powers under section 12 of the Radio-active Substances Act 1960 to enter premises to carry out inspections. There are 17 radiochemical inspectors.

Sections 280 and 281 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 enable the Secretary of State to authorise persons to enter land for survey or inspection. Planning inspectors are thus authorised, but in practice when site visits are required they are always arranged with the parties concerned. There are 175 full-time salaried planning inspectors and 126 fee-paid inspectors.

Under the Parks Regulations Act 1872, as amended by the Parks Regulation Amendment Acts of 1926 and 1974, royal parks police constables whilst within the royal parks have the same powers as the Metropolitan police. There are 153 royal parks constables.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sir Johnn Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the operation of the powers bestowed on the Nature Conservancy Council in relation to the establishment of sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to provide for appeal machinery following designations of sites of special scientific interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mr. Waldegrave: This proposal was considered and rejected during the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and subsequently by the Environment Committee of this House (first report, Session 1984-85). I am satisfied that existing procedures are adequate.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if, in view of the recent establishment by the Nature Conservancy Council of sites of special scientific interest on reservoirs in the east Midlands such as Pitsford and Rutland water, restricting or curtailing access by anglers, he will seek an assurance from the Nature Conservancy Council that no further sites of special scientific interest will be created in the area;

(2) before establishing new sites of special scientific interest on reservoirs and other water areas where fishing is enjoyed, what consideration the Nature Conservancy Council gives to the general availability of such fishing in the area.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Nature Conservancy Council has a statutory duty to notify areas which, in its opinion, are of special interest by reason of any of their flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features. Although angling may be specified as a potentially damaging activity in such areas, the Nature Conservancy Council endeavours to reach agreements which reconcile fishing and conservation interests. I understand that the agreement with Anglian water authority, in the case of Rutland water and Pitsford in fact permits an overall increase in fishing activity, and that two reservoirs in the area, Stamford and Hollowell, have recently been de-notified as sites of special scientific interest.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the Nature Conservancy Council has established a site of special scientific interest at Pitsford reservoir, Northants, without prior consultation with anglers and the Federation of Midland Flyfishers.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Nature Conservancy Council is required to notify all owners and occupiers of land in a site which in its opinion, is of special interest. It is impractical to notify, and the Nature Conservancy Council would not necessarily be aware of, others who might be concerned.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, on the basis of his Department's voluntary inquiry on construction activity, he will give details of local authority starts and completions of dwellings built by direct labour departments in each of the years 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. John Patten: About 80 per cent. of local authorities in England reply to the Department's voluntary quarterly inquiry on construction activity, but only a small proportion of these build dwellings by direct labour. In the period 1 January 1984 to 30 September 1986, local authorities reported as follows although not all responded in every quarter.

Local Authority	*1984*		*1985*		*1986*[1]	
	Starts	*Completions*	*Starts*	*Completions*	*Starts*	*Completions*
Barrown in Furness	[3]33	[3]41	33	50	[3]0	[3]20
Blackburn	n/a	n/a	115	0	0	17
Brent	[3]0	[3]42	100	86	[3]218	[3]78
Chester le Street[2]	0	0	0	0	6	0
Darlington	115	166	108	114	[3]20	[3]43
Derby[2]	0	24	0	37	0	0
Derwentside	[3]63	[3]65	6	71	[3]56	[3]35
Doncaster[2]	48	63	0	0	0	0
Durham	[3]26	[3]29	28	25	4	1
East Yorkshire[2]	0	0	0	0	24	0
Ellesmere Port	0	0	0	0	[3]0	[3]4
Gateshead[2]	67	33	107	132	93	74
Greenwich	[3]0	[3]74	[3]0	[3]51	0	72
Harlow[2]	107	16	149	31	31	89
Islington	[3]15	[3]0	0	0	0	0
Kingston-upon-Hull	[3]15	[3]89	18	217	0	18
Lambeth[3]	75	196	0	0	75	48
Leeds	0	0	24	0	[3]31	[3]24
Lincoln DC	80	64	10	108	0	12
Manchester[2]	186	277	0	0	0	0
Mansfield	[3]28	[3]0	[3]3	[3]94	0	18
North Tyneside	[3]21	[3]8	19	21	0	0
Reading	[3]0	[3]0	28	28	0	0
Rotherham	0	4	0	0	0	0
Sandwell[2]	82	233	8	130	0	54
Sedgefield[2]	0	0	0	0	10	2
Sheffield	[3]0	[3]49	1	0	[3]32	[3]0
South Tyneside	[3]2	[3]28	53	14	35	29
Stoke on Trent	192	27	47	46	0	12
Sunderland	n/a	n/a	[3]11	[3]0	[3]19	[3]22
Wakefield[2]	107	159	44	112	31	50
Wear Valley[2]	0	5	0	0	0	0
Wyre Forest	0	0	[3]4	[3]0	66	0

[1] First three quarters
[2] Complete response
[3] Partial response—incomplete data
n/a Not available

Departmental Costs

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of staff in his Department on 1 April for each of the years 1985 and 1986; what was the figure for 5 January 1987; and what is the current cost to public funds, including salaries, pensions and overheads of running it.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of staff in the Department of the Environment (Central) at 1 April 1985 and 1986 was 6,560·5 and 6,521 respectively. Staff in post figures are collated for the first of each month. On 1 January 1987 the estimated total was 6,430. The cost of running the Department in 1986-87 is expected to be about £152 million. This includes a notional amount for superannuation payments which are met by the Paymaster General's Office.

Caravans Legislation

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now review the workings of the Caravans Act 1968 in Surrey, in the light of the growth of the gipsy population in that county in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The Department monitors the working of the Caravan Sites Act in Surrey, as elsewhere, and is in touch from time to time with Surrey county council about the implementation of its programme of site provision.

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to review the operation of the Caravans Act 1968; when he intends to announce his conclusions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: We are currently reviewing the operation of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and expect to announce our conclusions very shortly.

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now review the operations of the Caravan Sites Act 1960 in respect of the unauthorised occupation of sites.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. I am satisfied that the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, which

prohibits use of land as a caravan site without a site licence, provides local authorities with effective powers to prevent unauthorised use.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Raymsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties are currently held by the London residuary body in the Fulham constituency; how many of those are empty; and what are the latest proposals for the use or disposal of these properties.

Mr. Chope: These are all matters for which the London residuary body is responsible.

Agricultural Land (Change of Use)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his Department's estimates of the number of acres of agricultural land likely to become available for other use in each of the next three years; and what change of use he envisages, expressed as a percentage.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have nothing to add to the answer given to my hon. Friend by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 15 January.

Housing (Thurrock)

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of completions of units of accommodation by the local authority in the Thurrock constituency in 1983 and 1986.

Mr. Tracey: Information on local authority housebuilding is not kept on a constituency basis. Numbers of new dwellings completed by Thurrock borough council in 1983 and the first half of 1986 appear in issues Nos. 73 and 79 of "Local Housing Statistics" which are available in the Library.

They are as follows:

	Number
1983	149
[1]1986	10

[1] first half

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the amount of the housing improvement programme allocation for Thurrock district council for each year from 1978-79 to 1986-87.

Mr. Tracey: Housing investment programme allocations for Thurrock district have been as follows:

Year	*HIP Allocation £000*
1978-79	3,424
1979-80	3,607
1980-81	3,101
1981-82	3,093
1982-83	3,217
1983-84	2,900
1984-85	2,849
1985-86	2,396
1986-87	3,207

In addition, the council has been able to use part of its capital receipts.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of completions of privately owned units of accommodation in the Thurrock constituency between 1983 and 1986.

Mr. Tracey: Information on private sector housebuilding is not kept on a constituency basis. Numbers of new dwellings completed by the private sector in the Thurrock borough council area in the years 1983 to 1986 appear in issues Nos. 73, 74, 78 and 79 of "Local Housing Statistics" which are available in the Library.

They are as follows:

	Number
1983	431
1984	423
1985	415
1986[1]	188

[1] First half.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of units of accommodation owned by Thurrock borough council in the Thurrock constituency between 1983 and 1986.

Mr. Tracey: The information is not held on a constituency basis. The total number of dwellings owned by Thurrock borough council at 1 April 1983 and 1 April 1986 was 16,529 and 15,236.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secrertary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of prefabricated concrete cement houses in the Thurrock constituency *(a)* in private ownership, having been purchased from the local authority in 1986, and *(b)* continuing in local authority ownership in 1986.

Mr. Tracey: The Council's 1986 housing investment programme return shows that there were 247 prefabricated reinforced concrete houses in the Thurrock borough council area in private ownership at 1 April 1986. It is reasonable to assume that all these were bought from the local authority. The return showed 340 PRC houses in the ownership of the local authority at the same date.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all moneys paid or revenue deferred in enterprise zones for each year since their establishment in total support and in *(a)* tax incentive and *(b)* rates relief for Scotland, Wales and England.

Mr. John Patten: The available information on enterprise zones in Great Britain up to December 1985, including the value of public sector investment and grant payments, the estimated net cost to the Exchequer of capital allowances and payments in respect of rates revenue forgone by local authorities for the years 1981-82 to 1984-85, is contained in "Enterprise Zone Information 1984-85" published in October 1986, copies of which were placed in the Library. Payments in respect of rates revenue forgone in 1985-86 amounted to £25 million.

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* those Acts of Parliament since 1979 concerning *(a)* local government finance and *(b)* local authority duties, powers and responsibilities.

Mr. Ridley: A considerable number of public general Acts, not all of them the responsibility of my Department, have some effect on the duties, powers and responsibilities of local authorities, and may thus affect the finances of those authorities. A list of the more major Acts since 1979 is set out below. Acts concerned purely with finance or of major significance in connection with local government finance generally are marked with an asterisk:

1979
- Education Act (c. 49)
- Weights and Measures Act (c. 45)

1980
- Education Act (c. 20)
- Highways Act (c. 66)
- Housing Act (c. 51)
- Local Government Planning and Land Act (c. 65)*

1981
- Disabled Persons Act (c. 43)
- Education Act (c. 60)
- Local Government and Planning (Amendment) Act (c. 41)
- Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act (c. 36)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act (c. 69)
- Zoo Licensing Act (c. 37)

1982
- Children's Homes Act (c. 20)
- Derelict Land Act (c. 42)
- Local Government Finance Act (c. 32)*
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (c. 30)
- Social Security and Housing Benefits Act (c. 24)

1983
- Local Authority (Expenditure Powers) Act (c. 52)*
- Water Act (c. 23)

1984
- Cycle Tracks Act (c. 38)
- Education (Grants and Awards) Act (c. 11)*
- Housing and Building Control Act (c. 29)
- Housing Defects Act (c. 50)
- Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act (c. 53)
- London Regional Transport Act (c. 32)
- Rates Act (c. 33)*

1985
- Further Education Act (c. 47)
- Local Government (Access to Information) Act (c. 43)
- Local Government Act (c. 51)
- Mineral Workings Act (c. 12)
- Social Security Act (c. 53)
- Transport Act (c. 67)

1986
- Airports Act (c. 31)
- Educaation Act (c. 40)
- Eduction (Amendment) Act (c. 1)
- Housing and Planning Act (c. 63)
- Local Government Act (c. 10)*
- Rate Support Grant Act (c. 54)*
- Road Traffic Regulation (Parking) Act (c. 27)

(*Note:* Consolidation Acts and Scottish Acts are not included in the above list.)

Liverpool City Council

Mr. Waeing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby's letter of 9 December 1986 in respect of marginal savings accruing to Her Majesty's Government as a result of the withholding of certain payments to Liverpool city council during 1985.

Dr. Boyson: I am replying to the hon. Member today

Welsh Office (Parking)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for th Environment how many fines or fixed penalty payment were incurred by official vehicles for unauthorised parkin outside or near to the Welsh Office during each year of it existence.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have been asked to reply.

Twenty-two in 1986 and 34 in 1985; information fo previous years could be provided only at disproprotionat cost.

Broadleaved Woodlands (Conservation)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for th Environment if he will make a statement on arrangement to ensure the conservation of broadleaved woodlands an on felling licence regulations.

Mr. John MacKay: I have been asked to reply.

The Government set out a comprehensive policy for th conservation and enhancement of broadleaved woodland in a statement by my right hon. Friend, the Member fo Ayr (Mr. Younger), on 24 July 1985 at columns 557-562

In line with the statement, felling controls were tightened in December 1985 to reduce the volume o timber which may be felled witthout a licence. The Forestry Act 1986 also empowered the Forestry Commission to require restocking following illegal felling

ENERGY

Concessionary Fuel Schemes

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on concessionary fuel schemes.

Mr. David Hunt: The provision of concessionary fuel is a matter for British Coal and is governed by agreements with the unions.

Nuclear Accidents

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government have signed the International Atomic Energy Agency's convention on early notification of a nuclear accident adopted on 26 September 1986; when Her Majesty's Government expect to ratify it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The conventions adopted by the IAEA on 26 September 1986 on early notification of, and mutual assistance in the event of, nuclear accidents and radiological emergencies were both signed by the UK on that day. Both Conventions will be ratified as soon as possible. In his speech to the special session of the IAEA's general conference my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy made clear that Her Majesty's Government would apply both conventions in advance of formal ratification.

EMPLOYMENT

Entry and Search Powers

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Paymaster General how many officials for whom he has responsibility currently

have the power to enter and search premises, subject to statutory conditions; and, in each case, if he will indicate the statutory authority under which power is exercised.

Mr. Trippier: There are 2,233 officials for whom I have responsibility who have the power to enter premises under the following legislative provisions:

Health and Safety at Work &c. Act 1974
Docks and Harbours Act 1966
Gas Safety (Rights of Entry) Regulations 1983
Wages Act 1986
Social Security Act 1975
Employment Agencies Act 1973 (as amended by the Employment Protection Act 1975)

Their powers include inspection, examination and investigation but not specifically powers of search.

Community Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General how much was spent last year on community programme linked training; how much will be spent in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In 1985-86 it is provisionally estimated that £3·5 million was spent on community programme linked training. The figure planned for 1986-87 is £5·2 million.

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General how many places there are at present on national initiatives on the community programme.

Mr. Lee: At the latest count, in November 1986, there were 26,100 filled places on national initiatives.

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General what proportion of community programme participants are subject to an EC4 form.

Mr. Lee: The EC4 form referred to by the hon. Member is a record of termination of employment by participants on the community programme. Its purpose is to provide information on the success of community programme workers in going on to other employment and training opportunities.

However, since completion of the form is voluntary the information provided is incomplete and I am unable to answer the question in the form requested. In order to improve this source of information, however, the form has been revised and from 2 February 1987 there will be a requirement for project sponsors to complete it.

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General how many schemes for tender currently exist on the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Schemes for tender arrangements were introduced in 1982 in order to encourage the building industry to participate in the community programme, and its predecessor the community enterprise programme, by allowing private building contractors to tender for, and sponsor, building projects.

Although a small number of projects are known to have operated under these arrangements, no central record is kept and it is not possible to state with any certainty how many such projects are currently running. However, the arrangements have not been widely used and as a result discussions have been taking place with the building employers about how they might be improved. Currently the Manpower Services Commission is awaiting detailed proposals from the building employers in this regard.

Engineering Industry

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General what was the number of people employed in the engineering industry in 1979 and 1983, and at the latest available date.

Mr. Lee: The information is in the following table. The latest available data is for November 1986, and the figures for June 1986 are given because comparison between the figures for June and November could be affected by seasonal factors.

Employees in employment in the engineering industry, in Great Britain

thousands

	Mechanical engineering (32)[1]	*Electrical and electronic engineering (34)*[1]	*Instrument engineering (37)*[1]
June 1979	1,033	752	129
June 1983	768	605	102
June 1986	724	565	105
November 1986	716	561	102

[1] Classes of the standard industrial classification 1980.

Centres for the Unemployed

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General if the Manpower Services Commission will continue to develop joint sponsorship of centres for the unemployed with local authorities.

Mr. Lee: The Manpower Services Commission currently provides funds through the community programme to provide employment opportunities for long-term unemployed people at 83 centres for the unemployed, all of which are sponsored by local authorities. There are no plans to develop further such projects within the community programme.

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General how his Department assesses the success of trade union centres for the unemployed receiving Manpower Services Commission support.

Mr. Lee: All community programme projects are monitored to ensure that they meet the objectives of the programme, are managed effectively, and provide worthwhile employment opportunities for long-term unemployed people.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Flannery asked the Paymaster General what is the net loss in manufacturing jobs in the south Yorkshire region since 1979.

Mr. Lee: The precise information requested is not available. The Department's statistics for the county monitor only net changes in employment between census dates.

The available figures are from the September 1981 and the preceding June 1978 census of employment. In that period there was a net change of minus 47,500 employees in manufacturing industries, as defined according to the Standard Industrial Classification 1968, in the county of South Yorkshire. The September 1984 census estimates for counties are not yet available. Between censuses, employment statistics are based on small-scale sample inquiries which cannot produce reliable results for areas smaller than the standard economic regions.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General what is the decline in numbers and as a percentage between 1979 and June 1986 in *(a)* construction employment and *(b)* construction and manufacturing employment in (i) Great Britain and (ii) the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: The information is as follows:

Employees in employment: net changes between June 1979 and June 1986

	Great Britain		United Kingdom	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Construction industry (5)[1]	−235,000	−19·6	−252,000	−20·4
Construction and manufacturing industries (2-5)[1]	−2,194,000	−26·4	−2,259,000	−26·6

[1] The figures in brackets denote the Divisions of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.

Employment Measures

Dr. McDonald asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* the percentage of those long-term unemployed leaving the employment register after being contacted through the restart scheme who have been *(a)* added to the sickness register or *(b)* added to the disablement register; and if he will further break down the latter figure, according to sex and age groups (i) under 24 years, (ii) 25 years to 44 years, (iii) 45 years to 59 years and (iv) over 60 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dr. McDonald asked the Paymaster General (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each job club *(a)* its location, *(b)* the length of time it has been operational, *(c)* the number of males and females who have been members, *(d)* the percentage success rate in each case and *(e)* the average number of weeks as a member (i) for those unemployed finding employment through the job club system and (ii) for those unemployed leaving the job club scheme not having found employment;

(2) if he will number and identify *(a)* those groups who have been successful in finding employment through the job club system, and *(b)* those groups who have left the job club system not having found employment, in terms of standard age groups, sex, and standard duration of prior unemployment groups;

(3) if he will publish in the *Official Report* in respect of *(a)* the community programme, *(b)* the enterprise allowance scheme, *(c)* the restart scheme, *(d)* the job club system, and *(e)* the job start scheme (i) the statistical survey title, (ii) the survey date, (iii) the publication date; and if for each item he will show the distinction between surveys of the pilot, participant or follow-up types.

Mr. Lee: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Knox asked the Paymaster General how much the Manpower Services Commission spends on employment measures per head of the labour force in *(a)* each English region, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The figures for approximate total estimated expenditure in 1986-87 on all Manpower Services Commission programmes, including employment and training measures, are given in the table below. Manpower Services Commission salaries, capital expenditure, central services and some other costs which cannot be apportioned by region are excluded.

Approximate spend per head of the labour force[1]

Manpower Services Commission Region	£
South East	59
London	66
South West	121
Midlands	116
Yorkshire and Humberside	129
North West	131
Northern	179
Wales	161
Scotland	143
Great Britain	107

[1] The labour force includes the employed and self-employed, and the unemployed who are available for work.

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Paymaster General how many people in Avon have left the employment register through the restart programme since it started.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: We have no means of knowing what proportion of the 2,706 long-term unemployed people who have left the unemployment count in Avon since the beginning of the Restart scheme did so as a direct result of the scheme. Long-term unemployed people leave unemployment for a variety of reasons, including finding work, or training with or without the assistance offered at Restart interviews, Restart training courses and at job clubs.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General what was the total cost per head for breakfasts provided for business bodies and opinion formers at the Action for Jobs launches.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: Costs vary from place to place, but the average total cost per head of the breakfast is £4·90.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General (1) out of whose budget the cost of the breakfast launches for Action for Jobs for opinion formers and business bodies comes;

(2) what has been the breakdown of costs for the breakfast launch of Action for Jobs on a region by region basis;

(3) what has been the total cost to the Government of the breakfast presentations to business leaders and opinion formers in relation to the Action for Jobs projects.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: The total cost of the breakfast presentations held in 1986 was £164,141·56. This figure represents 0·0055 per cent. of the total £2·956 billion expenditure by the Department of Employment and Manpower Services Commission this year on employment, enterprise and training measures. I believe that this expenditure is

necessary to increase knowledge of the programmes that we now have on offer among those who are intended to benefit from them and who can help others to benefit from them. The table allocates the costs by Department of Employment regions:

Region	Cost £
Midlands	25,783·75
South West	36,365·70
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,794·28
North West	57,429·62
South East	37,151·91
Scotland	3,616·30

Action for Jobs expenditure is included in the Department of Employment's budget Vote 3.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General (1) how many opinion formers and business leaders have been invited to the breakfast launches of the Action for Jobs programme *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region;

(2) which cities and towns have been used for the launch of breakfast presentations by the Action for Jobs project.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: Thirteen breakfast presentations were held in 1986 to increase awareness of the employment, enterprise and training measures offered by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission and particularly to reach local employers whose participation is crucial to the success of many of the programmes. Invitations to the breakfasts were sent to some 13,643 people in all. The location of the breakfasts and the numbers invited are listed below by Department of Employment region:

Region	Locations	Number invited
Midlands	Leicester, Birmingham, Droitwich	2,888
South West	Bristol, Bournemouth	2,613
Yorks and Humberside	Leeds	804
North West	Carlisle, Chester, Manchester, Burnley	4,355
South East	Maidstone, Brighton	2,481
Scotland	Edinburgh	502
		13,643

We intend to hold breakfast presentations in the following towns and cities in the early part of 1987.

Region	Locations
Yorks and Humberside	York
South East	London
Eastern	Cambridge
Scotland	Glasgow, Ayr
Northern	Middlesbrough, Newcastle

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Paymaster General how many people entered the youth training scheme in Hyndburn and north-east Lancashire in 1985; what was the placement percentage; and how many people completed the scheme.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: Between April 1985 and March 1986 a total of 1,145 young people entered YTS in Hyndburn and a total of 1,190 entered in the rest of north-east Lancashire.

The Manpower Services Commission follow-up survey of YTS leavers shows that of those who left YTS schemes in Hyndburn between April 1985 and March 1986, 68 per cent. were in work some three months after leaving and 78 per cent. were either in work or in further education/training. The comparable figures for the rest of north-east Lancashire are 66 per cent. in work and 77 per cent. either in work or in further education/training.

From April 1985 until March 1986 a total of 469 young people completed YTS schemes in Hyndburn and 536 completed in the rest of north-east Lancashire.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Smoke-free Cells)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the policy of expecting prison governors to treat applications from prisoners for smoke-free cells was introduced; how it was first communicated to governors; when it was last confirmed to governors as policy; and how this policy is made known to prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: As I indicated in my reply of 18 December 1986 to a previous question from the hon. Member, guidance to governors and medical officers designed to extend prisoners' opportunities to enjoy a smoke-free environment is being prepared. In that context, governors will be encouraged to give favourable consideration to requests to be located in a smoke-free cell where such a course is judged to be practicable in the circumstances of the case and having regard to local conditions at the time. They will also be asked to ensure that prisoners are made aware of the possibility of a smoke-free location being arranged if it is requested.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 1336, he will give a detailed and referenced account of his Department's attempts to obtain from Dr. Frank Skuse details of the methods used by him in the Griess tests that he conducted on the men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has anything to add to his explanation of Dr. Frank Skuse's early retirement in his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column 1334.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that the answer I gave on 18 December to a supplementary question from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard) was not entirely accurate. The position is as explained in my letter of 23 December to the hon. Member for Brightside and a copy of that letter was placed in the Library.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of west midlands as to the circumstances in which former Detective Sergeant Brian Morton left the West Midlands police.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the course of his investigations

into the allegations contained in an affadavit by Tom Clarke handed to him on 1 December 1986, he or any of his officials have interviewed (i) Sergeant Dennis Holt, (ii) Detective Constable Jenning, and (iii) Police Constable William Coffey.

Mr. Mellor: No, but I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend this afternoon in which he said that the Devon and Cornwall constabulary would be investigating Mr. Clarke's allegations.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions he or any of his officials interviewed *(a)* Police Constable George Cole, *(b)* Detective Sergeant Alan Watson, *(c)* Detective Sergeant Michael French, *(d)* Detective Sergeant James Kelly, *(e)* former Detective Inspector John Moore or *(f)* former Detective Superintendent George Reade during his inquiry into the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list what representations he has received since 1 December 1986 concerning the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: Since 1 December 1986 we have received about 70 letters, including some 25 from right hon. and hon. Members forwarding letters from their constituents expressing concern about the safety of the convictions of these six men.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police force he asked to investigate the claim in Chris Mullin's book, "Error of Judgement", on the Birmingham pub bombings that the men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings were not responsible for the bombings.

Mr. Mellor: We sought comments from the west Midlands police on Mr. Mullin's claim that four other men were responsible for the bombings, but did not consider that this claim merited a formal investigation.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police force he asked to investigate the allegations made against the West Midlands police force by Mr. Tom Clarke in an affidavit delivered to him on 1 December 1986.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend made today.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken, if any, to interview *(a)* Prison Officer Gordon Willingham, *(b)* Prison Officer Brian Sharp and *(c)* Prison Officer Patrick Murtagh regarding injuries on the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings at the time of their admission to Her Majesty's prison Winson Green on 25 November 1975.

Mr. Mellor: None in the course of the recent review of the case.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account has been taken of the unsigned statements of the three prison officers concerning injuries on the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings at the time of their admission to Her Majesty's prison Winson Green on 25 November 1975, which were supplied in October 1985 to the Home Secretary by the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) in his re-examination of the convictions.

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend sent me unsigned statements by six prison officers. We took them fully into account in our review of the case.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to produce the playing cards taken at the time of their arrest from five of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, to assist in the re-examination of the forensic evidence.

Mr. Mellor: The disposal of the property of persons later convicted is a matter for the chief constable of the force concerned. Now that the case has been referred to the Court of Appeal, it will be open to the men to ask the court to exercise its power to order the production of anything connected with the proceedings. The playing cards are not in the possession or control of the Home Office, but we shall of course be glad to assist, if we can, in ensuring that they are produced if the court so wishes.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if any action has been taken concerning the former director of the Home Office forensic laboratory at Chorley concerning the provision of allegedly incorrect information regarding the Griess test to Granada television.

Mr. Mellor: The officer concerned has since retired from the public service. According to his own account of the matter, the information which he supplied was based on details given to him by Dr. Skuse. As the hon. Member will know from my right hon. Friend's statement today, the case to which this question relates is being referred to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance note on the Griess test written by Dr. Frank Skuse referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard) on 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 1334.

Mr. Mellor: We do not think that this would be appropriate. The note contains information which could be of value to terrorists or others who make unlawful use of explosives.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the precise date of the guidance note on the Griess test written by Dr. Frank Skuse which he refers to in his reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard) on 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, column 1334.

Mr. Mellor: It is undated, but was circulated for a meeting which took place on 14 February 1975.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage strength solution of caustic soda recommended for Griess explosives tests in the methods manual of the Home Office forensic science laboratory at *(a)* Wetherby, *(b)* Huntingdon, *(c)* Chorley, *(d)* Chepstow, *(e)* Birmingham and *(f)* Aldermaston, in the first year after 1974 that each such manual was compiled; and whether there has been any change in those recommended percentages in any year since.

Mr. Mellor: The Chorley laboratory methods manual was written in 1976 and prescribed the use of 0·1 per cent. caustic soda/Griess reagent for the presumptive testing of suspected explosives traces. In 1986 the manual was amended to exclude the use of this procedure, thus formalising a situation which had existed since 1981.

The methods manuals of the other Home Office laboratories contain no reference to the use of this technique for the presumptive testing of explosives traces.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make available a list of the exhibits produced at the trial of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Mr. Mellor: A list of exhibits is among papers being returned to the Court of Appeal. It will be open to the defendants or their representatives to apply to the court for access to papers.

Prison Visits

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he last visited Her Majesty's prison Long Lartin; and for what purpose;

(2) when he last visited Her Majesty's prison Gartree; and for what purpose;

(3) when he last visited Her Majesty's prison Wakefield; and for what purpose;

(4) when he last visited Her Majesty's prison Wormwood Scrubs; and for what purpose.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend visited Wormwood Scrubs prison on 1 November 1985 as part of a programme of visits drawn up to enable him to see at first hand the work of the prison service in all types of penal establishment. He went again for its carol service last Christmas.

He has not yet visited Gartree, Long Lartin and Wakefield prisons.

Leeds-Bradford Airport

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make an announcement about the possible designation of Leeds-Bradford airport as a port of entry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The review of the Immigration (Ports of Entry) Order has been completed and my right hon. Friend hopes to announce his decision shortly.

Tottenham Riots (Police Costs)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the legal costs to date incurred by the Metropolitan police in pursuance of cases arising from the Tottenham riots.

Mr. Douglass Hogg: No. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Licensing Hours (Extensions)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in respect of each bench of licensing magistrates sitting in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire, the number of applications received for extensions of licensing hours and the percentage granted in respect of the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Waddington: The only information collected centrally about extensions of licensing houses, which can be obtained under various provisions, relates to grants of special hours certificates and is given in the table.

Special hours certificates granted in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk in respect of on-licensed premises and registered clubs, July 1985-June 1986.

	Number
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridge	10
Ely	2
Huntingdon	—
Newmarket	—
North Witchford	—
Peterborough	3
Toseland	—
Wisbech	—
Lincolnshire	
Boston	—
Bourre	—
Caistor	1
East Elloe	1
Gainsborough	5
Grantham	—
Horncastle	1
Lincoln (City)	3
Lincoln (Country)	1
Louth	—
Market Rasen	—
Sleaford	1
Spilsby and Skegness	8
Stansford	—
West Elloe	—
Norfolk	
Cromer	—
Diss	2
Downham Market	2
East Dereham	—
Fakenham	2
Great Yarmouth	8
Hunstanton	6
Kings Lynn	10
North Walsham	1
Norwich	4
Swaffham	1
Thetford	—
Wymondham	1
Suffolk	
Beccles	1
Blything	—
Bury St. Edmunds	1
Felixstowe	3
Harismere	—
Ipswich	—
Lowestoft	5
Mildenhall	1
Newmarket	—
Risbridge	—
Stow	—
Sudbury and Cosford	1
Woodbridge	—

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether French police will travel on trains using the proposed Channel fixed link and whether they will disembark in all cases at Ashford.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The arrangements for policing the tunnel system are still under discussion between the British and French Governments.

Bus Lanes

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been relating to unauthorised vehicles in bus lanes in London for the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 24 November 1986 at column 50.

New Prison, Wrexham

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is prepared to consider, for the new prison, sites in addition to the one at present under examination at Wrexham, if any were found to be available and generally acceptable.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. *108*]: Yes. Following consultations with Wrexham Maelor borough council on 8 December the prison department is awaiting details of possible alternative sites which will be considered in the light of the general requirements for sites for new prison construction.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will consider plans for building a smaller prison at Wrexham than at present suggested.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. *108*]: The final size of the prison for which planning clearance will be sought in due course will depend on the outcome of the detailed feasibility study which is being undertaken by the Property Services Agency.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on what days he first informed Wrexham Maelor borough council and Clwyd county council of his intention to build a category C closed prison for about 600 inmates at Wrexham.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. *252*]: The attention of the prison department was first drawn to the possible suitability of the site for a prison project by Clwyd county council in 1984. After initial exchanges of correspondence on the matter and a site visit, a meeting to discuss outline proposals was held with the chief executive and other officers of Clwyd county council on 27 March 1986, at which the chief planning officer of Wrexham Maelor borough council was present. I understand that prior to that meeting there had been some liaison between the county and borough councils about the proposed project. Formal negotiations with Wrexham Maelor borough council, under the provisions of Department of the Environment circular 18/84, were commenced on 8 December 1986.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what permanent new employment he expects to be created as a result of his plans to build a new prison at Wrexham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c.*252*]: About 300 permanent new jobs would be created in the new prison.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much it costs to maintain the welfare of retirement pensioners by wardens in the constituency of Newry and Armagh;

(2) how many retirement pensioners in Northern Ireland are presently living in warden-controlled dwellings in the constituency of Newry and Armagh.

Mr. Viggers: Information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many retirement pensioners are presently residing in retirement homes paid for by the Department of Health and Social Services in the constituency of Newry and Armagh.

Mr. Viggers: The information is not available in the form requested. However, at 31 December 1985 (the latest date for which figures are available) the number of retirement pensioners accommodated in statutory old people's homes provided in the Southern Health and Social Services Board area was as follows:

	Number
Newry and Mourne Unit of Management	117
Armagh and Dungannon Unit of Management	170

Warden-controlled Areas

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends phasing out the present system of warden-controlled areas.

Mr. Viggers: This is a matter for each Health and Social Services Board.

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to ensure that resources are available to ensure that every person suffering from, or suspected as suffering from, incontinence, receives a medical and nursing assessment; what information he has about variations from one part of the country to another in this regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: Medical and nursing assessments are already available in all Health and Social Services Board areas for patients suffering from incontinence. It is a matter for Health and Social Services Board to determine how their available resources should be allocated in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evaluations have been made on the quality of the goods used in the management of incontinence; what evaluation units have been set up within his Department; what are proposed in assessing the quality of goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: While no evaluations have been made by the Department of Health and Social Services it recently brought to the attention of the Health and Social Services

Boards the results of a study conducted at St. Pancras Hospital from April 1983 to April 1985. It included clinical trials, technical assessments and review of laboratory testing of incontinence garments.

It is for the Health and Social Services Boards to assess and decide the best and most cost-effective means of providing these garments and I am satisfied that they are doing so in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what support his Department is giving to the research into uro-dynamic investigation; if he will provide funds for the establishment of regional uro-dynamic investigation units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: The Department of Health and Social Services is not at present directly funding any research projects into uro-dynamic investigation. Any applications received for funding in this field would be considered on their merits along with other Health and Social Services projects.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice his Department gives to general practitioners and hospital authorities regarding the treatment of incontinence caused by constipation; what investigations his Department has done on the subject of bowel management and faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: None. It would be inappropriate for the Department to give specific advice or guidance on all the detailed aspects of incontinence or to carry out investigations into such clinical problems. It is a matter for staff to decide on the basis of their own professional judgment how to advise and treat their patients.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department will provide courses for general practitioners to assist them to recognise overflow incontinence in the case of severely constipated patients who are referred to geriatric hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend on 13 January 1987 [*Official Report*, Vol. 108, col. *152*].

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is responsible for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence and its treatment in all forms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: Responsibility for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence, its treatment and the provision of services rests with Health and Social Services Boards in conjunction with professional medical and nursing bodies.

Bowel Problems

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines his Department gives with regard to the management of bowel problems by non-skilled and untrained assistants in geriatric units and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: General guidance is given in the handbook "Improving Geriatric Care in Hospital" and the memorandum of guidance "Residential Homes for the Elderly—Arrangements for Health Care". However, the issue of detailed operational guidelines for the management of bowel problems is a matter for each Health and Social Services Board.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department will promote a research programme and study of the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals who are suffering from mental confusion caused by faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: No. The number of patients who suffer from mental confusion caused by faecal impaction is extremely small and does not justify a research programme.

Forestry

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on arrangements to ensure the conservation of broadleaved woodlands and on felling licence regulations;

(2) what safeguards exist to protect broadleaved and ancient semi-natural woodlands from felling or conversion to coniferous woodland or agricultural land.

Mr. Viggers: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Health and Social Services (Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give *(a)* the total gross expenditure on health services, *(b)* total expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(c)* revenue expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(d)* capital expenditure on the hospital and community health service, *(e)* expenditure on family practitioner services, *(f)* expenditure on centrally-funded services and *(g)* expenditure on personal social services for each year since 1974-75 in cash terms and adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator and the relevant indexes of pay and prices.

Mr. Viggers [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: The information is set out in the tables.

(a) Total gross expenditure on health and personal social services—£m.

		Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by:	
	Cash	*GDP deflators*	*HPSS pay and prices factors*
1974-75	150·3	509·0	543·9
1975-76	209·8	564·7	593·4
1976-77	247·2	587·7	618·6
1977-78	274·5	573·0	628·5
1978-79	319·3	602·3	660·2
1979-80	388·8	627·6	672·1
1980-81	491·1	668·2	674·1
1981-82	553·7	685·8	695·3
1982-83	599·1	692·0	701·7
1983-84	645·5	713·5	719·6
1984-85	677·5	718·2	715·0
1985-86	709·6	709·6	709·6

(b) Total gross expenditure on the Hospital and Community Health Services—£m.

	Cash	Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by: GDP deflators	HPSS pay and prices factors
1974-75	99·8	337·5	359·4
1975-76	142·0	382·2	396·4
1976-77	165·2	392·8	405·7
1977-78	182·0	379·9	410·3
1978-79	209·5	395·2	430·2
1979-80	256·8	414·5	437·7
1980-81	324·1	441·0	433·2
1981-82	361·8	448·1	448·2
1982-83	384·4	444·0	448·5
1983-84	411·1	454·4	457·2
1984-85	431·5	457·4	454·1
1985-86	450·7	450·7	450·7

(c) Gross Revenue Expenditure on Hospital and Community Health Services[1]—£m.

	Cash	Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by: GDP deflators	HPSS pay and prices factors
1974-75	91·9	310·8	333·2
1975-76	129·6	348·8	365·0
1976-77	150·8	358·6	373·1
1977-78	166·9	348·4	380·4
1978-79	192·0	362·2	399·2
1979-80	236·0	380·9	407·1
1980-81	303·7	413·2	409·4
1981-82	339·6	420·6	423·1
1982-83	363·0	419·3	424·7
1983-84	389·1	430·1	433·1
1984-85	409·1	433·7	430·4
1985-86	429·5	429·5	429·5

[1] Total revenue expenditure less the amount apportioned to personal social services.

(d) Capital expenditure on the Hospital and Community Health Services[1]—£m.

	Cash	Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by: GDP deflators	HPSS pay and prices factors
1974-75	7·9	26·7	26·2
1975-76	12·4	33·4	31·4
1976-77	14·4	34·2	32·6
1977-78	15·1	31·5	29·9
1978-79	17·5	33·0	31·0
1979-80	20·8	33·6	30·6
1980-81	20·4	27·8	23·8
1981-82	22·2	27·5	25·1
1982-83	21·4	24·7	23·8
1983-84	22·0	24·3	24·1
1984-85	22·4	23·7	23·7
1985-86	21·2	21·2	21·2

[1] Total capital expenditure less the amount apportioned to personal social services.

(e) Family Practitioner Services Expenditure (Gross)—£ million

	Cash	Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by GDP deflators	HPSS pay and prices factors
1974-75	26·7	90·3	105·3
1975-76	34·7	93·4	108·4
1976-77	40·6	96·5	114·8
1977-78	47·0	98·1	120·2
1978-79	54·2	102·2	120·2
1979-80	63·4	102·3	120·0
1980-81	80·4	109·4	121·6
1981-82	93·0	115·2	124·5
1982-83	105·7	122·1	126·8
1983-84	116·5	128·8	132·6
1984-85	122·9	130·3	130·9
1985-86	127·1	127·1	127·1

(f) Expenditure on Centrally-funded Services[1]—£ million

	Cash	Cash adjusted (at 1985-86 prices) by GDP deflators	HPSS pay and prices factors
1974-75	4·5	15·2	16·3
1975-76	5·5	14·8	15·5
1976-77	9·8	23·3	24·2
1977-78	7·6	15·9	17·3
1978-79	8·7	16·4	18·1
1979-80	9·7	15·7	16·7
1980-81	12·5	17·0	16·9
1981-82	14·9	18·5	18·6
1982-83	16·8	19·4	19·7
1983-84	18·0	19·9	20·0
1984-85	19·7	20·9	20·7
1985-86	20·3	20·3	20·3

[1] Excludes Departmental Administration

Maghaberry Prison

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the current male and female populations of Maghaberry prison in Northern Ireland; and what is the certified normal accommodation;

(2) whether there are any plans to allocate additional prisoners to Maghaberry prison during 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1986]: There are separate prisons for males and females at Maghaberry. The certified normal accommodation for the male prison is 432 and is 56 for the female prison.

On 14 January 1987 the population of the male prison was 11 and of the female prison was 31. The female prison contains the whole remand and sentenced female prison population in Northern Ireland; we intend to increase the prisoner population of the male prison throughout 1987.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Whisky Industry

Mr. Canavan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what subjects he discussed at his last meeting with representatives of the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I met representatives of the industry at the beginning of December. Among the subjects discussed were the alcoholic strength at which whisky is being marketed in the EC and the difficult competitive position for Scotch whisky in the Japanese market.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether, within the environmentally sensitive areas, the payments announced on 18 December 1986 will be available to voluntary conservation bodies for the management of land purchased with the help of grand aid from statutory conservation bodies;

(2) if, within environmentally sensitive areas, the payments announced on 18 December 1986 will be available to all landowners managing land for agricultural purposes, including voluntary conservation bodies.

Mr. Donald Thompson [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: Voluntary conservation bodies or their tenants are entitled to apply for payment under the environmentally sensitive areas arrangements. Each such application will be considered individually. Where a body, landowner or other individual has already agreed to protect the environmental value of the land and has received public funds for that purpose, there could in some cases be double payment if an environmentally sensitive area agreement were offered in addition. Normal principles of Government accounting on the proper use of public funds would prevent the Ministry from accepting applications in such cases.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

9. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria he uses to decide whether to publish the reports of the new Advisory Committee on Teachers Pay and Conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: All reports of the advisory committee on teachers' pay and conditions would be published.

20. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next proposes to meet representatives of the teachers unions to discuss pay and conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am meeting representatives of the National Union of Teachers tomorrow. I am sure that the issue of teachers' pay and conditions of service will be raised. I am very willing to conduct further meetings with any of the teacher unions whenever they wish to see me.

13. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the association of local education authorities to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met the leader of the local authority employers last Thursday to discuss teachers' pay and conditions and related issues.

28. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on teachers' appraisal.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: At my invitation, six local education authorities have formed a consortium to pilot teacher appraisal in their schools. They are:

Croydon
Cumbria
Newcastle
Salford
Somerset
Suffolk

The project is being funded through the education support grant arrangements and a steering group has been established involving representatives of the Secretary of State, local education authorities and the teachers' unions.

32. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

44. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

38. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

41. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Stott asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The dates of my recent meetings with the teachers' unions to discuss pay and conditions are:

18 December 1986 — National Association of Head Teachers.
19 December 1986—Secondary Heads Association.
6 January 1987—Professional Association of Teachers.
12 January 1987 — National Association of Teachers/ Union of Women Teachers.

I am meeting the National Union of Teachers tomorrow.

36. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on his proposals to set up an advisory committee on teachers' pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received a small number of representations on the proposal to set up an Advisory Committee on teachers' pay and conditions, including representations from the local authority associations and teachers' unions.

39. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the position regarding teachers' pay and conditions.

42. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current position regarding negotiations with the teachers' unions on pay and conditions.

74. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the teachers' pay negotiations.

89. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the pay and conditions of teachers.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts).

50. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received regarding teachers' pay.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since my statement on 30 October 1986, I have received some 200 letters from hon. Members about teachers' pay and conditions and around 1,600 letters from members of the public, including representatives of the local education authorities, teachers' unions and parents.

53. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the association of the local education authorities to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

59. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the association of the local education authorities to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

76. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the associations of the local education authorities to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

83. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the association of the local education authorities to discuss teachers' pay and conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

92. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent discussions he has had with local education authorities regarding matters affecting teacher discipline and responsibilities.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has had a number of recent meetings with representatives of the local education authorities to discuss the pay and conditions of school teachers. He has had no discussions on the specific subject of teacher discipline.

Primary Schools (Expenditure)

10. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in England in 1978 and in the most recent year for which figures are available, in real terms; and what are the comparable figures for primary schools in Staffordshire.

Mr. Dunn: Local educational authorities in England spent an average of £650 per primary pupil in 1978-79 and £760 in 1984-85. The comparable figures for Staffordshire are £665 and £770. The cash figures for 1978-79 have been repriced to 1984-85 real terms using the gross domestic product deflator.

Replan

11. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement concerning the future of Replan after 1988.

Mr. Dunn: Having reviewed the progress made by Replan during the past year, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales have agreed that the programme's duration should be extended to 31 December 1989.

School Meals

14. **Mr. Garrett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for school meals.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's forecast of expenditure on school meals next year is for a modest reduction of present levels of spending. However, we continue to regard school meals as one of the services where many LEAs could achieve substantial savings in their net costs by introducing more efficient methods of working. Grant-related expenditure has been assessed on that basis.

23. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what figures he has on the number of staff employed in the supervision of school meals.

Mr. Dunn: Figures for midday supervision will be available in the spring when the results of the October 1986 school meals census are known.

37. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make it his policy to introduce national nutritional standards for school meals.

Mr. Dunn: No. It is for local education authorities to decide what standards and quantities of food should be made available and for parents to decide what their children should eat.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now estimate the cost for the United Kingdom as a whole in 1985-86 of school meals provided free of charge for *(a)* pupils and *(b)* staff.

Mr. Dunn: It was not practicable to hold a school meals census in October 1985 in England in view of the disruption to the service caused by the teachers' dispute. The Department therefore does not have the information to calculate the proportions of school meals expenditure attributable to free meals for pupils and staff. The school meals service in the rest of the United Kingdom is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Technical Research

16. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the current facilities for technical research.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Facilities for research are being continually improved. Since 1979 university equipment grants have increased by 24 per cent. and the Science Budget by 11 per cent., compared with general levels of inflation.

Special Education

17. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will increase resources to implement the provisions on special education in the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's plans for local authority spending in 1987-88, announced last November, represent a cash increase of 18·8 per cent. over the 1986-87 plans. This will enable local education authorities to increase their spending on areas which they consider have priority, including special education.

58. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will increase resources to implement the provisions on special education in the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd).

School Buildings

18. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the repair and maintenance of school buildings.

61. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the level of resources available for the repair and maintenance of school buildings.

87. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the repair and maintenance of school buildings.

88. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the current level of resources for the repair and maintenance of school buildings.

Mr. Dunn: If local education authorities budget sensibly, the Government's plans for local authority current expenditure on education will permit a 14 per cent. increase in real terms in spending on the repair and maintenance of school buildings in 1987-88, compared with actual spending in 1984-85.

79. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the cost required to bring all school buildings to a satisfactory condition; and what steps he is taking to ensure that greater cost is not being deferred to some future date because of present lack of maintenance.

Mr. Dunn: It is not possible to make such an estimate at present. Once analysis of them is complete, however, the returns provided by LEAs in England for the Department's sample survey of school building improvement needs should enable us to do so in respect of county and controlled schools. The Government's plans for local authority recurrent expenditure on education in 1987-88 allow for a 14 per cent. increase in real terms over authorities' actual expenditure in 1984-85 on the repair and maintenance of school buildings, provided authorities budget sensibly.

City Technology Colleges

19. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on progress on plans for the city technology colleges.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made on the establishment of city technology colleges.

78. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made towards establishing city technology colleges.

56. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made towards the establishment of city technology colleges.

82. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made towards establishing city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Members to the answer which I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Ryedale (Mrs Shields) and Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud).

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will report on the progress of his initiatives to improve standards of education in inner cities.

Mr. Dunn: The policy of my right hon. Friend is to improve standards of education in all schools, including those in inner cities where special assistance is given through the urban programme, section 11 grant, the inner cities, initiative and education support grants. The city technology college initiative will also contribute to an improvement in the standards of education in inner cities.

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many inquiries he has so far received from individuals or groups interested in establishing city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Several hundred organisations and individuals, many expressing an interest in sponsorship or co-sponsorship of a city technology college have written to the Department since the invitation was issued in mid-October 1986.

86. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he now expects the first city technology college to come into operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have set September 1988 as the target date for the opening of the first city technology college. It is too soon to say whether this can be achieved.

Schools (Resources and Equipment)

21. **Mr. Torney** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teachers' unions and associations to discuss the level of resources and equipment available to classroom teachers.

Mr. Dunn: Over the past months my right hon. Friend has had meetings with several of the teachers' unions and associations at their request to discuss topics they have raised, including resources.

Polytechnics

22. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics to discuss the provision of resources for polytechnics.

27. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics to discuss the provision of resources for polytechnics.

52. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics to discuss the provision of resources for polytechnics.

73. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics to discuss the provision of resources for polytechnics.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I last met the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics on 3 October 1986 when the provision of resources was among the subjects discussed.

Student Grants

24. **Mr. Mark Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

33. **Mr. Craigen** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

45. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

69. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) and for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd).

Primary and Secondary Schools (Books)

25. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the purchasing of books in primary and secondary schools.

63. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of books in primary and secondary schools.

90. **Mr. Faulds** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the purchasing of books in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Members to my reply earlier today to the hon. Members for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) and for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe).

Higher Education (Non-academic Pay)

26. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the level of non-academic pay in higher education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government are not involved in the pay negotiations for this group of staff. It is for universities and local education authorities to reach agreement on pay levels which they can afford having regard to recruitment, retention and motivation.

Further Education (MSC)

29. **Mr. Snape** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss the involvement of the commission in further education.

47. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss the involvement of the commission in further education.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has regular meetings with the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss its work. Their last meeting took place on 5 November 1986.

Brain Drain

30. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Association of University Teachers to discuss the number of academics who have emigrated in the past years.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend last met the AUT on 18 December to discuss a range of matters touching upon university pay.

Higher Education (Pay)

31. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Association of University Teachers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the level of academic pay in higher education.

54. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Association of University Teachers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the level of academic pay in higher education.

60. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Association of University Teachers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the level of academic pay in higher education.

64. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Association of University Teachers to discuss the level of academic pay in higher education.

75. **Mrs. Dunwoody** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the level of academic pay in higher education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I last met representatives of the Association of University Teachers on 18 December 1986 and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education on 15 October 1986.

Mathematics and Physics Teachers

34. **Mr. McLoughlin** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any proposals to deal with the shortage of mathematics and physics teachers in some schools.

Mr. Dunn: A number of measures have been taken to improve the supply of mathematics and physics teachers. These include the introduction of a £1,200 bursary scheme for trainee teachers, development funding for training courses designed to tap new sources of recruitment, and substantial funding in support of in-service training. A new unit to publicise career opportunities in teaching will be operational shortly. We are working with the education service and with industry on further possible initiatives.

University of Wales

35. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the funding of the University of Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received about 70 representations from hon. Members, staff and students about the funding of the constituent colleges of the University of Wales. I will be meeting the Pro-Chancellor and other representatives of the University on 29 January.

Higher Education

40. **Mr. Hancock** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the future numbers of students entering higher education.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's policy is that places should be available for all who have the intellectual competence, maturity and motivation to benefit from higher education and who wish to do so. Revised projections of demand for higher education were published in November; a copy is in the Library.

67. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any proposals to increase the resources available to higher education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I announced on 6 November that recurrent grant for universities in Great Britain would be £95 million higher in 1987-88 than in the current year and that university equipment grant would increase by £6·5 million. For public sector higher education in England I announced on 19 December that the advanced further education pool would increase by £55·5 million in 1987-88 and that grants to voluntary colleges would rise by £3·5 million. Related increases in the Government's expenditure plans for 1988-89 and 1989-90 were included in Cmnd. 56 published last week..

Sex Education

46. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he proposes to bring into effect section 46 of the Education Act 1986, relating to sex education in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Section 46 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 came into force on 7 January 1987.

Assisted Places Scheme

48. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the number of places available in Leicester schools under the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Dunn: None

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the level of parental contributions to the fees of pupils in the assisted places scheme in 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to the usual consultations and to parliamentary approval, the parental contribution scales will be adjusted upwards for the school year 1987-88 as follows:

Part of relevant income to which specified percentage applies	*One assisted pupil*	*Each of two assisted pupils*	*Each of three assisted pupils*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
That part which exceeds £6,806 but does not exceed £7,400	9	6·75	5·25
That part (if any) which exceeds £7,400 but does not exceed £8,005	12	9	7
That part (if any) which exceeds £8,005 but does not exceed £9,204	15	11·25	8·75
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,204 but does not exceed £11,049	21	15·75	12·25
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,049 but does not exceed £13,458	24	18	14
That part (if any) which exceeds £13,458	33	24·75	19·25

Education Quality

49. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further measures he will introduce to improve the quality of education in England and Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: When the wide range of Government measures already in train or announced has been fully implemented, the impact on the quality of education will be substantial. I shall where appropriate propose further measures in the light of the developments in hand.

Vocational Education

51. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to encourage vocational education in schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Government believe that an important objective for the school curriculum is that it should

become increasingly practical and relevant to the demands of adult and working life. We are pursuing a number of policies to this end, including the technical and vocational education initiative which is being extended later this year to be available to 14-18 year olds in all maintained schools and colleges.

Secondary Schools

55. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the associations of local education authorities to discuss the problem of the reorganisation of secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: The issue of school rationalisation and the scope it provides for the removal of surplus places and for current expenditure savings, was discussed at a meeting between the associations and my right hon. Friend on 29 September 1986 to discuss the Government's proposals for local authority current expenditure in 1987-88.

Universities (Funding)

43. **Mr. O'Neill** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the provision of resources for universities.

57. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the provision of resources for universities.

62. **Mr. Blair** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the provision of resources for universities.

65. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the provision of resources for universities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met representatives of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on 9 September to discuss the provision of resources for universities generally and on 17 December to discuss the resources available for the pay of academic staff. I also addressed the CVCP's anual conference on 23 September.

Head Teachers and Governors

66. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his proposals to give greater powers to head teachers and boards of governors.

Mr. Dunn: The Government firmly believe that more effective education can be secured by putting more power and responsibilities in the hands of individual schools. This is being achieved under the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 which substantially increases the role of governing bodies and head teachers.

Further Education (Funding)

68. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to discuss the level of resources in further education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I last met NATFHE on 15 October 1986. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) met representatives of the Association on 3 December 1986.

Universities (Funding)

81. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his latest estimate of the amount of funds which British universities have attracted in the current financial year from commercial sponsors for research and development projects; what was the comparable figure in 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: In 1984-85, the most recent year for which comprehensive figures are available, universities received £47 million in research grants and contracts from United Kingdom industry. This compares with an equivalent income of £23 million in 1981-82, the first year this information was collected. The Government welcome this increase but note that research income from industry still amounts to only just over 2 per cent. of total university income and thus believe there is scope for further significant increases.

Grammar Schools

70. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of secondary schoolchildren attend grammar schools; and what percentage of A-level passes in grades A to C are secured by pupils from grammar schools.

Mr. Dunn: In January 1986, 3 per cent. of pupils in maintained secondary schools (excluding middle deemed secondary) in England were attending grammar schools. Grammar school leavers in the academic year 1984-85 held 14·8 per cent. of the A-level passes at grades A-C obtained by leavers from all maintained schools.

Aberdeen University

71. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from staff and students at Aberdeen university regarding the future structure of academic terms.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received four letters from staff and students at Aberdeen university about proposals being considered there for possible changes in the structure and length of degree courses.

School Governing Bodies

77. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he plans to take against those local education authorities which ignore the wishes of their school governing bodies.

Mr. Dunn: Generally, the position of governing bodies will be strengthened by the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 which clarifies the relative powers and responsibilities of those involved in running individual schools. My right hon. Friend retains the power under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1944 to intervene in cases where a local education authority has manifestly abused its powers or neglected its duties.

Religious Education

80. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he takes to monitor compliance by schools with the provisions of the Education Act 1944 about religious education.

Mr. Dunn: We look to schools themselves and their local education authorities to observe the requirements which the Act lays on them. Where complaints are made to my right hon. Friend that these requirements are not being met in a particular school they are fully and carefully investigated. Very few such complaints are made each year.

Scottish Universities (UGC Grants)

91. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from Scottish universities about the future allocation of grants fom the University Grants Committee.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received about 55 representations from staff and students at Scottish universities about recurrent grants for 1986-87 and the University Grants Committee's allocations.

Clinical Academic Staff

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* information available to him on those universities that have yet to implement the nationally agreed pay award to clinical academic staff.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am not aware of any university that has not implemented the increases agreed by the Clinical Academic Staff Salaries Committee with effect from 1 July 1986.

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to assess expenditure in universities and polytechnics on computer studies and other information technology related courses separately from mathematics and other non-related courses.

Mr. Dunn: The University Grants Committee and the Universities' Statistical Record have recently introduced a separate classification for computer science, but other information technology related courses are covered by broader classifications including electrical and electronic engineering, physical sciences, and business and management studies. Computer studies and other information technology related courses are not separately identified in returns by polytechnics.

University of East Anglia

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding proposals to cut back the school of development studies at the University of East Anglia.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received 15 representations concerning the University of East Anglia's current discussions about the future funding of its school of development studies.

Central Funding

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those courses in the school curriculum which are now centrally funded and were not so funded in June 1979.

Mr. Dunn: The whole of the technical and vocational education initiative and three quarters of the cost of the Lower Attaining Pupils Programme are funded by central Government. Education Support Grants have afforded considerable support to the school curriculum.

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what courses being taught in maintained schools in Bedfordshire are now centrally funded and were not so funded in June 1979.

Mr. Dunn: Bedfordshire has a pilot project within the technical and vocational education initiative. Education Support Grants are assisting with the cost of employing advisory teachers in mathematics, and with the development of science teaching in primary schools.

University Entrants

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of school-leavers entering full-time degree courses at university in 1986 from each education authority; and if he will express these figures as a proportion of the number of students in secondary education in each authority.

Mr. Dunn: Data on leavers from maintained schools are:

Leavers from maintained schools intending to pursue a full-time degree course at university
Average of academic years 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85

	Number (000)	*As percentage of total leavers*
Barking	0·05	2·0
Barnet	0·28	7·9
Bexley	0·15	4·1
Brent	0·08	2·5
Bromley	0·24	6·1
Croydon	0·21	4·6
Ealing	0·12	3·3
Enfield	0·19	4·7
Haringey	0·08	3·4
Harrow	0·18	7·3
Havering	0·16	4·0
Hillingdon	0·10	3·1
Hounslow	0·12	4·2
Kingston-upon-Thames	0·11	6·1
Merton	0·10	4·9
Newham	0·04	1·2
Redbridge	0·09	3·4
Richmond-upon-Thames	—	—
Sutton	0·16	6·7
Waltham Forest	0·05	1·8
ILEA	0·62	2·3
Birmingham	0·49	2·9
Coventry	0·18	3·4
Dudley	0·13	2·6
Sandwell	0·08	1·5
Solihull	0·20	5·2
Walsall	0·20	4·0
Wolverhampton	0·12	2·7
Knowsley	0·03	0·9
Liverpool	0·27	3·6
St. Helens	0·14	4·4
Sefton	0·28	5·9
Wirral	0·25	5·1

	Number (000)	As percentage of total leavers
Bolton	0·23	5·4
Bury	0·09	3·4
Manchester	0·27	3·5
Oldham	0·09	2·6
Rochdale	0·10	3·3
Salford	0·12	3·1
Stockport	0·28	6·2
Tameside	0·09	2·2
Trafford	0·15	4·9
Wigan	0·19	3·1
Barnsley	0·07	1·8
Doncaster	0·16	3·4
Rotherham	0·16	3·5
Sheffield	0·38	4·5
Bradford	0·23	2·9
Calderdale	0·13	4·0
Kirklees	0·25	4·0
Leeds	0·49	4·6
Wakefield	0·09	1·8
Gateshead	0·10	3·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	0·12	3·2
North Tyneside	0·11	3·8
South Tyneside	0·08	2·9
Sunderland	0·12	2·4
Avon	0·49	3·8
Bedfordshire	0·32	4·1
Berkshire	0·54	5·3
Buckinghamshire	0·66	7·7
Cambridgeshire	0·33	4·0
Cheshire	0·74	4·9
Cleveland	0·53	5·2
Cornwall	0·26	3·8
Cumbria	0·31	4·3
Derbyshire	0·56	3·8
Devon	0·41	3·1
Dorset	0·41	4·9
Durham	0·38	3·9
East Sussex	0·43	5·4
Essex	1·10	4·7
Gloucestershire	0·36	4·8
Hampshire	0·85	3·7
Hereford and Worcester	0·43	4·6
Hertfordshire	0·95	6·1
Humberside	0·55	3·9
Isle of Wight	0·08	4·5
Kent	1·23	5·3
Lancashire	0·71	3·3
Leicestershire	0·69	5·1
Lincolnshire	0·38	4·6
Norfolk	0·31	3·0
North Yorkshire	0·70	7·0
Northamptonshire	0·27	3·1
Northumberland	0·16	3·6
Nottinghamshire	0·58	3·5
Oxfordshire	0·44	5·5
Shropshire	0·23	3·6
Somerset	0·15	2·5
Staffordshire	0·54	3·4
Suffolk	0·26	3·0
Surrey	0·90	6·8
Warwickshire	0·34	4·6
West Sussex	0·44	4·7
Wiltshire	0·33	4·2
ENGLAND	28·94	4·1

Source: School Leavers Survey.
Data subject to sampling error and has been averaged over three years to reduce its significance.

Note: LEA's vary in the extent to which post 16 education provision is centred in schools, tertiary or other FE colleges. In this context Richmond, for example, with no school sixth forms, has no leavers intending to pursue university degree courses.

Expenditure

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table based on table 3.12 of the public expenditure White Paper Cmnd. 56-II, with all figures converted to 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is set out in the table. The figures have been revalued using the GDP (market prices) deflator, which is assumed to rise by 3·75, 3·5 and 3·0 per cent. respectively in the years 1987-88 to 1989-90.

The figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 in the table below have been calculated by revaluing the unrounded planning figures for those years. All figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest £1 million.

£ million at 1986-87 prices

	1981-82 outturn	*1982-83 outturn*	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*	*1985-86 outturn*[1]	*1986-87 estimated outturn*[2]	*1987-88 plans*	*1988-89 plans*	*1989-90 plans*
Schools	9,189	9,100	9,123	9,046	8,920	9,923	9,962	10,151	10,139
Higher and further education	4,571	4,707	4,744	4,739	4,523	4,592	4,476	4,470	4,466
Miscellaneous educational services, research and administration	772	789	839	852	867	924	934	922	922
Research Councils and related bodies	575	573	589	596	604	615	632	624	615
Total Department of Education and Science	15,105	15,168	15,294	15,232	14,913	15,954	16,004	16,157	16,130
Central government—Voted in Estimates									
Schools									
Assisted places scheme	4	10	17	24	30	37	48	51	53
City technology colleges	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	18	30
Music and ballet schools	7	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	4
Building grants to voluntary and special schools	56	46	43	49	56	50	52	51	50
Higher and further education (including teacher training)[4]									
Universities									
Capital	153	144	135	132	138	154	148	143	140

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn[1]	1986-87 estimated outturn[2]	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Current	1,331	1,497	1,487	1,463	1,416	1,411	1,456	1,455	1,455
Voluntary and direct grant institutions									
Capital	3	5	5	6	5	6	5	5	5
Current	100	103	100	93	88	90	92	92	91
Adult education	13	13	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Postgraduate awards to humanities students and other student awards	8	7	4	5	4	6	6	7	7
Miscellaneous services, research and administration									
Youth service	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Research programme and other education services	20	18	22	23	24	23	25	24	23
Administration and inspection costs	40	39	51	53	53	54	56	55	55
Compensation payments	5	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	6
Research Councils, etc.									
Capital	91	91	86	84	93	88	74	74	73
Current (including postgraduate science awards)	485	482	502	512	511	527	558	548	542
Total voted expenditure	2,319	2,468	2,479	2,470	2,445	2,474	2,552	2,550	2,553
Other central government Schools	−5	−4	−4	−4	−4	—	—	—	—
Total central government	2,314	2,463	2,475	2,466	2,441	2,474	2,552	2,550	2,553
Of which: Total central government capital expenditure	*302*	*283*	*265*	*269*	*289*	*299*	*282*	*279*	*271*
Local authorities—Relevant current spending									
Schools									
Under fives	307	326	337	361	363	402	407	416	424
Primary schools	2,880	2,794	2,751	2,713	2,696	3,031	3,133	3,205	3,272
Secondary schools	4,215	4,216	4,252	4,213	4,143	4,573	4,648	4,762	4,665
Special schools	443	454	469	472	464	503	508	508	514
Meals and milk	505	489	485	467	451	455	434	432	429
Transport	222	219	222	217	213	219	206	200	196
Non-maintained school fees	136	136	134	132	125	125	118	114	109
Teachers centres	27	27	27	31	32	35	40	42	42
Child guidance	33	33	32	34	35	39	39	39	39
Pupil support	31	31	31	35	36	38	36	36	38
Higher and further education[4]									
Advanced further education	642	724	724	730	719	743	707	729	735
Non-advanced further education	1,008	1,045	1,060	1,090	1,017	1,013	985	966	956
Adult education	85	92	98	102	105	110	107	107	108
Discretionary student awards and support	136	144	150	155	165	183	190	196	203
Misellaneous services, research and administration									
Youth service	110	115	124	128	134	148	152	156	160
Recreational services and research	52	55	61	63	66	73	74	78	80
Administration and inspection costs	517	517	543	549	553	590	602	589	578
Total relevant current spending	11,348	11,418	11,502	11,492	11,317	12,283	12,386	12,576	12,548
Non-relevant current spending									
Mandatory student awards[4]	983	796	835	812	732	724	714	706	705
Local authority capital[3]									
Schools	328	317	323	298	277	310	288	271	268
Higher and further education	109	139	132	136	121	135	50	46	46
Miscellaneous education services:									
Youth service	8	14	11	13	11	11	8	7	7
Other education services	17	21	17	14	15	15	6	5	5
Total local authority capital	461	491	483	461	424	471	351	329	326
Total local authorities	12,791	12,706	12,820	12,766	12,472	13,479	13,452	13,611	13,578

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn[1]	1986-87 estimated outturn[2]	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Total Department of Education and Science	15,105	15,168	15,294	15,232	14,913	15,954	16,004	16,157	16,130

[1] The 1985-86 figures incorporate a distribution by sector of total current spending by local authorities based on their provisional outturn expenditure on education.
[2] The 1986-87 figures incorporate a provisional distribution by sector of total current spending by local authorities based on their budgets.
[3] From 1981-82 local authority capital expenditure includes provision for the urban programme.
[4] The change in the trend of higher education and student award figures between 1981-82 and 1982-83 reflects the reduction in tuition fees described in Cmnd. 8494.

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on expenditure to be supported by education support grant in 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In 1987-88 the Government intends to assist expenditure of £92 million in England through education support grant. My Department will pay grant on that expenditure at 70 per cent.—£64 million of Exchequer grant in all. Every local education authority in England will benefit from the programme.

Within the overall figure of £92 million, over £38 million of expenditure on schemes of midday supervision will be supported, and about £34 million of expenditure on other projects started this year or last. The amount available to start new projects next year will be £20·1 million. This will be spent on 10 activities. Of these, eight have appeared in previous programmes, and two are new types of pilot project this year; to promote social responsibility in young people; to develop the use of the spoken word by pupils aged 5 to 16.

All of the local education authorities in England bid for grant support, and for each of the activities subject to open bidding the total of bids exceeded the total expenditure which could be supported.

The Department will today inform local education authorities of the levels of expenditure which I have approved for all of the activities to be supported in 1987-88, except that relating to information systems for management of further education establishments on which I expect to announce approvals in the early spring.

The table sets out for the nine activities in which new starts are now approved the levels of expenditure to be supported next year and the numbers of authorities for whom I have approved projects.

New Starts Approved for 1987-88

Activity	Total allocation (£m cash)	Number of LEAs to be supported
1. Provision of books and equipment for GCSE examination courses	10·0	[1]97
2. Developing the use of the spoken word	0·31	7
3. Promoting social responsibility	1·11	20
4. Computerised learning aids for students in FE with special educational needs	0·47	32
5. Strengthening college-employer links in non-advanced further education	0·26	12
6. The provision of re-training and up-dating courses directed towards the needs of industry and commerce (PICKUP)	0·40	17
7. The development of information technology at FE establishments	3·86	84
8. The planning, development and co-ordination of provision to meet the educational needs of the unemployed	1·78	51
9. Support for parents in the teaching of children under five with special educational needs	0·52	16

[1] i.e. all

Royal Greenwich Observatory

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received favouring the relocation of the Royal Greenwich observatory to Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has recently received one such letter. There has been no change in the situation since my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) announced on 13 November at column 2 that the necessary approvals in principle had been given in connection with the Science and Engineering Research Council's proposal to move the Royal Greenwich observatory to Cambridge.

WALES

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that resources are available to ensure that every person suffering from, or suspected as suffering from, incontinence receives a medical and nursing assessment; what information he has about variations from one part of the country to another in that regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: It is for individual authorities to decide for themselves how best to allocate their resources to meet their local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluations have been made on the quality of the goods used in the management of incontinence; what evaluation units have been set up within his Department; what are proposed in assessing the quality of goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Two evaluations carried out under the DHSS aids assessment programme were reported on in 1982-83. These covered incontinence garments and incontinence aids for handicapped children.

More recently, an evaluation study of incontinence pads and garments was funded by the Government at the department of geriatric medicine in the medical school of university college hospital, London. The report of this study was reported in the health equipment information series (no. 159, October 1986). Further work is being undertaken and will be reported in due course.

I understand that discussions are in progress with a view to establishing an evaluation unit to undertake a programme of assessments of incontinence products.

The need for such assessment is recognised as an important means of achieving the most effective use of the significant resources devoted to this area.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what support his Department is giving to the research into uro-dynamic investigation; if he will provide funds for the estabishment of regional uro-dynamic investigation units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Basic urological research is being supported by the Medical Research Council, which is the main Government-funded agency for medical and biological research in the United Kingdom. Central funds are provided for uro-dynamic investigation within the regional spinal injuries rehabilitation service at Rookwood hospital, Cardiff.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department will provide courses for general practitioners to assist them to recognise overflow incontinence in the case of severely constipated patients who are referred to geriatric hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 13 January at column *156*.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales who is responsible for co-ordinating the advising on the problems of incontinence and its treatment in all forms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Arrangements for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence, its treatment and the provision of services is a matter for individual health and local authorities. Many of them have appointed continence advisers to carry out these functions following advice given by the Welsh Office in 1977 that the management of incontinence should be clearly identified as the responsibility of a designated special nurse. Individuals suffering from incontinence should seek advice on treatment and management of the problem from their general practitioner, district nurse or health visitor.

Bowel Problems

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice his Department gives to general practitioners and hospital authorities regarding the treatment of incontinence caused by constipation; what investigations his Department has done on the subject of bowel management and faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what guidelines his Department gives with regard to the management of bowel problems by non-skilled and untrained assistants in geriatric units and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: General guidance on the management of incontinence is given in the handbook of guidelines "Improving Geriatric Care in Hospital" and the memorandum of guidance "Residential Homes for the Elderly—Arrangements for Health Care". Guidance for general practitioners will be included in a training package under development as part of the Government's helping the community to care programme. However, it would not be appropriate to issue specific guidance on all the detailed clinical aspects of incontinence, as it is for clinicians to decide how to treat their patients. In geriatric units, a trained nurse should have the responsibility for planning the care of patients. Tasks undertaken by nursing auxiliaries should be under the direction and observation of the nurse in residential homes. The management of incontinence by care assistants should be under the supervision of trained staff. Advice and guidance on health care should be available from the community nursing services.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department will promote a research programme and study of the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals who are suffering from mental confusion caused by faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The results of research on faecal incontinence are widely available. The treatment of patients in psychiatric hospitals is a matter for the health authorities concerned.

Industrial Aid

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total sum of regional selective grants paid to industry in Wales during each year since 1976.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Payments of regional selective assistance grants made to industry in Wales under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 in each financial year since 1976-77 are as follows:

	£ million
1976-77	4
1977-78	6
1978-79	30
1979-80	19
1980-81	11
1981-82	9
1982-83	14
1983-84	15
1984-85	19
1985-86	23
[1]1986-87	19

[1] To 31 December 1986.

Farm Horticulture Development Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims were made in Wales under the farm horticulture development scheme during 1985 and 1986; what were the eligible costs of these claims; and what grant payments were made in relation to them.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

	1985	*1986*[1]
Number of claims received	3,047	1,079
Number of claims paid	3,273	1,415
Eligible costs of paid claims	£12,575,174	£6,285,916
Grant paid	£4,932,220	£2,551,582

[1] Figures available to 30 September 1986 only.

The farm and horticulture development scheme closed for new applications for development plans from 30 September 1980.

Farm Capital Grant Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims were made in Wales under the farm capital grant scheme during 1985 and 1986; what were the eligible costs of these claims; and what grant payments were made in relation to them.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This scheme was closed for new claims after 31 January 1984. In 1985, 12 claims were received in Wales, involving £41,784 eligible costs and grant of £20,928 was paid. There were no payments in 1986.

SCOTLAND

Area Health Boards (Patients)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *659*, what information is available centrally on patients awaiting treatment by area health boards.

Mr. John MacKay: A central return is made bi-annually of the number of patients waiting for inpatient treatment in each speciality within each hospital. The information relates to 31 March and 30 September.

Hypothermia

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths have been recorded in the Borders region each year since 1979 which noted hypothermia as the cause of death or as a contributory factor.

Mr. John MacKay: The numbers of deaths in the Borders Region since 1979 showing hypothermia as the underlying cause or as a contributory factor are shown below:

Deaths from hypothermia (any mention) in the Borders Region, 1979 to 1986

	Total all mentions	*Underlying cause*	*Contributory cause*
1979	3	1	2
1980	4	1	3
1981	5	2	3
1982	5	1	4
1983	2	—	2
1984	—	—	—
1985	3	1	2
1986*	3	—	3

* Provisional figures.

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that resources are available to ensure that every person suffering from, or suspected of suffering from, incontinence receives a medical and nursing assessment; what information he has about the variations from one part of the country to another in this regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: It is for each health board to allocate its resources on the basis of its knowledge of local needs and priorities. Assessment is provided, following referral by the general practitioner, in urological and, increasingly, gynaecological units. Its availability in different areas reflects the different approaches and interests of the clinicians dealing with incontinence.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what evaluations have been made on the quality of the goods used in the management of incontinence; what evaluation units have been set-up within his Department; what are proposed in assessing the quality of goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The results of the most recent evaluation of incontinence pads and garments, including clinical trials, technical assessments and a review of laboratory testing, were published in the Health Departments' health equipment information series in October 1986.

Goods used in the management of incontinence are provided to Scottish health boards under contracts or special price arrangements arranged by the Scottish Health Service Common Services Agency (CSA). These goods conform with standards of quality and/or specification established either by the DHSS procurement directorate or by CSA contract adjudication panels.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what advice his Department gives to general practitioners and hospital authorities regarding the treatment of incontinence caused by constipation; what investigations his Department has done on the subject of bowel management and faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement;

(2) who is responsible for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence and its treatment in all forms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Health boards and local authorities are responsible for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence and for the provision of services. Detailed clinical advice to individuals is best given by general practitioners and hospital medical and nursing staff. Any soundly-based proposals for financial support for research into aspects of incontinence will be carefully considered.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department will provide courses for general practitioners to assist them to recognise overflow incontinence in the case of severely constipated patients who are referred to geriatric hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 13 January 1987 [*Official Report*, Vol. 108, c. *163*].

Uro-dynamic Investigation

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what support his Department is giving to the research into uro-dynamic investigation; if he will provide funds for the establishment of regional uro-dynamic investigation units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The Scottish Home and Health Department is not at present supporting any research project in the specific field of uro-dynamic investigation but is willing to consider support for any soundly based research proposal. There are already a number of specialised urological units throughout Scotland where uro-dynamic investigation is carried out as part of the routine clinical assessment.

Bowel Problems

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines his Department gives with regard to the management of bowel problems by non-skilled and untrained assistants in geriatric units and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: It is for each health board to determine guidelines as necessary regarding the management of bowel problems by staff in NHS geriatric units.

In residential homes owned by or registered with the local authority, it is the responsibility of the authority to ensure that satisfactory standards of care are provided in accordance with its statutory responsibility under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The emphasis in such homes is very much on care. In a situation where an element of nursing became necessary, trained nurses from the Community Nursing Service would provide support.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department will provide a research programme and study of the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals who are suffering from mental confusion caused by faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: No. There is no evidence to suggest that primary mental illness is caused by faecal impaction.

Population Statistics (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of one-parent families in Dundee in 1981 where the head of the household was unemployed.

Mr. John MacKay: The 1981 census indicates that of the 1,293 economically active adults living alone with children aged under 16, 292 were not in employment. The information is contained in volume 1, table 38 of the 1981 census report for Tayside Region, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate from the 1981 census *(a)* the total number of households in Dundee and *(b)* the total number of children under 16 years of age in Dundee.

Mr. John MacKay: The total number of households in Dundee was 67,352 and the total number of children under 16 years of age was 38,164. The information is contained in volume 1, tables H and 8 of the 1981 census report for Tayside Region, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of children in Dundee resident within a one-parent family.

Mr. John MacKay: The 1981 census indicated that households consisting of a lone adult with children under 16 contained 3,621 children under 16. The information is contained in volume 1, table 38 of the 1981 census report for Tayside Region, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of households in Dundee which are one-parent families; and if he will disaggregate the figures to show how many of them are *(a)* divorced mothers, *(b)* separated mothers and unmarried mothers, *(c)* divorced fathers and *(d)* widowed mothers.

Mr. John MacKay: Information readily available from the 1981 census shows that there were 2,161 households containing one adult with one or more children under 16. Of these adults, 234 were male and 1,927 were female. There are no figures available on the disaggregation requested. The information is contained in volume 1, table 38 of the 1981 census report for Tayside Region, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mortality Statistics (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the number of deaths amongst women in Tayside in the latest available year, 1980, and 1976, respectively, from the following cancers: *(a)* breast, *(b)* lung, *(c)* colon, *(d)* stomach, *(e)* ovary, *(f)* pancreas, *(g)* rectum, *(h)* cervix, *(i)* oesophagus, *(j)* uterus and *(k)* bladder.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is shown in the table below:

Deaths of women from specific cancers, Tayside Health Board, 1976, 1980 and 1985

ICD[1] No.	*Cancer of:*	*1976*	*1980*	*1985*
174	breast	86	96	115
162	lung (trachea, bronchus and lung)	70	67	99

ICD[1] No.	Cancer of:	1976	1980	1985
153	colon	55	60	66
151	stomach	49	48	47
183·0	ovary	15	27	19
157	pancreas	26	37	25
154·1	rectum	26	21	25
180	cervix	17	15	19
150	oesophagus	22	23	17
179, 182	uterus (excluding cervix)	14	10	15
188	bladder	13	13	17

[1] International Classification of Diseases.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the number of deaths amongst women in Tayside health board in the latest available year; and what are the corresponding figures for 1980 and 1976, respectively.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Deaths of women in Tayside Health Board, 1976, 1980 and 1985

	Number
1976	2,558
1980	2,689
1985	2,832

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the net change in the number of unemployed to date in Dundee by district council ward since the present system of unemployment counting came into operation.

Mr. Lang: The change in the number of unemployed claimants in each electoral ward of the City of Dundee district between 6 March 1986 (the date the current method of compiling the unemployment statistics came into operation) and 11 December 1986 (the latest date for which information is available was as shown in the table below. This information is available in the Library.

City of Dundee local authority district

Ward name	Change	Per cent. change
Ancrum	−19	−9·50
Ardler	−21	−4·68
Balgillo	11	9·24
Baxter Park	12	4·15
Blackshade	−13	−3·23
Broughty Ferry	−4	−2·38
Caird	−56	−10·31
Central	44	13·17
Clepington	−2	−1·36
Coldside	−8	−2·29
Craigie Bank	17	7·62
Craigie Barns	−17	−10·49
Douglas	0	0·00
Downfield	−24	−9·41
Drumgeith	−28	−4·96
Dudhope	75	12·82
Eastern	3	2·08
Fairmuir	−5	−2·48
Fintry North	−60	−11·11
Fintry South	−47	−9·85
Gillburn	4	0·94
Gourdie	−14	−4·49
Gowrie	27	18·62
Hilltown	−3	−0·80
Law	−23	−9·54
Lochee East	−11	−2·70
Lochee West	−34	−9·91
Logie	−11	−5·61
Longhaugh	−29	−3·50
Maryfield	27	9·03
Menzieshill	−53	−17·91
Midmill	−19	−2·60
Monifieth East	0	0·00
Monifieth West	1	0·78
Pitalpin	−23	−6·76
Riverside	−2	−0·96
Rockwell	−25	−13·97
St. Mary's	−29	−8·01
St. Ninians	−18	−6·82
Sidlaw	0	0·00
Trottick	−51	−8·28
Wellgate	45	8·43
West Ferry	−37	−14·62
Whitfield	−108	−11·82
Totals	−528	−3·44

School Clothing (Payments)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what payments have been made by education authorities under section 54 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to parents of school-age children for the purchase of school clothing for the years 1981 to 1986; and what are the figures for each education authority in that period.

Mr. John MacKay: The information to the latest year available is as follows:

	Financial year (£ thousand)			
Education authority	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Borders	10	13	18	30
Central	126	248	324	393
Dumfries and Galloway	17	26	32	44
Fife	12	18	33	116
Grampian	—	4	8	11
Highland	17	32	63	93
Lothian	74	122	180	248
Strathclyde	444	1,937	2,917	3,034
Tayside	31	90	139	188
Orkney	3	4	4	5
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	19	37	18
Total	734	2,513	3,755	4,180

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure per head of school population for payments under sector 54 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 for each education authority from the years 1981 to 1986 for the purchase of school clothing.

Mr. John MacKay: The information to the latest date available is as follows:

Education authority	1981-82 £	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £
Borders	0·58	0·79	1·12	1·19
Central	2·43	5·00	6·77	8·43
Dumfries and Galloway	0·66	1·04	1·31	1·85
Fife	0·19	0·29	0·55	1·96
Grampian	—	0·05	0·55	0·14
Highland	0·45	0·88	1·75	2·62
Lothian	0·59	1·04	1·59	2·27

Education authority	1981-82 £	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £
Strathclyde	0·98	4·52	7·08	7·61
Tayside	0·48	1·39	2·21	3·08
Orkney	0·86	1·16	1·17	1·50
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	3·06	6·06	3·06

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued to social work authorities in Scotland since 1981 on their use of section 12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 in response to requests for assistance with provision of school clothing from parents of school-age children and in their liaison with education departments on provision designed to ensure that children attend school appropriately and adequately clothed.

Mr. John MacKay: None. Local authorities' powers to provide assistance in cash or in kind under this section are expressly related to situations where they would otherwise be required to take more extensive measures in respect of the child's welfare.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued to education authorities on the exercise of their duties under section 54 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Mr. John MacKay: Assistance with clothing under section 54 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is available only where a pupil is unable to take full advantage of the education offered because of the inadequacy or unsuitability of his clothing. This is a matter for decision by education authorities in the circumstances of individual cases and no central guidance has been issued.

YTS

Sir Hector Monro asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state, at the latest convenient date, the number of young people in Scotland registered at careers offices as unemployed and seeking a position on a YTS scheme who have not obtained one.

Mr. Rifkind: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, on 5 January 1987, of those young people in Scotland who had been unemployed since leaving school during the academic year 1985-86 and who were actively seeking a place on two-year YTS, only 366 were still awaiting an offer.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Surinam

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the French Government over the protection of British interests in Surinam.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any communication from the five continents peace initiative, Delhi six, on its initiatives to assist with the verification of compliance with a nuclear test ban treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The President of Mexico wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 25 August 1986 about the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the six nations/five continents group in Ixtapa Mexico on 6-7 August. My right hon. and learned Friend also received a parallel message from the Mexican Foreign Minister.

We welcome the emphasis which the Ixtapa meeting placed on verification issues, but we believe it would be premature to re-open negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty until progress in resolving outstanding issues particularly on verification becomes more apparent.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid Sussex, specifically discussed the outstanding problems of verification of a comprehensive test ban treaty during his recent visit to Moscow to meet his counterparts in the Soviet Foreign Ministry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I emphasised the importance of verification of arms control agreements across the board.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further initatives his Department intends to take at the United Nations committee on disarmament in achieving an agreement on the verification of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Renton: We continue to believe that the correct approach is to pursue further work at the conference on disarmament at Geneva through *(a)* an ad hoc committee with a non-negotiating mandate as proposed by the western group in 1984. We hope other countries will be able to respond to this, particularly those who claim that all verification issues have been resolved; *(b)* the ad hoc group of scientific experts, next meeting in March. The United Kingdom will continue to play an active role in this group.

Nuclear Test, Nevada

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom has any involvement in the planned nuclear test at the Nevada test site in the United States of America on 5 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We routinely announce joint United Kingdom-United States tests. It would not be appropriate to comment further on the reported United States test.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent it is necessary to test British nuclear warheads periodically for reliability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: As long as a comprehensive nuclear test ban fails to be negotiated the United Kingdom will continue to conduct tests in order to maintain the effectiveness of its nuclear capabilities.

Mr. Ravell Langeveldt

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the Governments of Kenya, Djibouti and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen regarding their refusal to offer medical assistance to the South African seaman Mr. Ravell Langeveldt who was eventually admitted to St. Thomas's hospital, London.

Mr. Eggar: We were not directly concerned and there was therefore no grounds for United Kingdom representations. Mr. Langeveldt was admitted under emergency procedures to the United Kingdom to receive the medical treatment he required. He has now recovered and returned to South Africa.

Helsinki Final Act

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means Her Majesty's Government monitor progress in the implementation by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and East European countries of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act during the last six months.

Mr. Renton: During the six-month period to 30 December 1986 implementation by the Soviet and Eastern European countries of their commitments under the Helsinki Final Act and the Madrid concluding document has continued to be generally unsatisfactory although compliance has varied from country to country. As a whole, the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe continued to take a one-sided view of the CSCE process, emphasising security and economic aspects at the expense of humanitarian issues. Indeed, there have been widespread breaches of the provisions relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, most notably in the Soviet Union.

Security in Europe: principles guiding relations between participating states; confidence-building measures and certain aspects of security and disarmament (Basket I)

The most striking feature of Eastern performance over the period was the continued violation of principle VII which covers

"respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief".

There has been no substantial change in the Soviet Union's unsatisfactory implementation of the Helsinki Final Act and Soviet performance in the field of human rights continued to be poor. Soviet persecution of dissidents, refuseniks and religious activists continued as did suppression of national minorities and persecution of political prisoners and their families. Prisoners of conscience continued to die while serving sentences. In August Mark Morozov, a member of the free trade union SMOT died in Chistopol prison, while in December, Anatoly Marchenko, a founder member of the Moscow Helsinki group, who had gone on hunger strike in August in protest against penal conditions, also died. He had similarly been transferred to Chistopol prison. In November, his family had evidently been told to reapply for permission to emigrate to Israel. The level of harassment to which believers, among others, were subjected, continued to be very harsh. The Jewish community continued to face difficulties over emigration and in practising its religion and culture. The monthly figures for Jewish emigration, although slightly higher than the previous reporting period, remained still unacceptably low. Confiscation of religious material from the homes of Soviet Jews, particularly of refuseniks, was widespread and the pressures on the teaching of Hebrew maintained. Details of the ill treatment of the Hebrew teacher Alexei Magarik (currently serving a three-year sentence) became known. He has reportedly been subjected to beatings whilst in camp.

The Russian Orthodox Deacon Rusak who wrote in 1983 to the World Council of Churches detailing the obstacles placed in the way of religious education in the USSR and subsequently sought permission to emigrate, was on 27 September sentenced to seven years in a labour camp and five in internal exile for

"anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda".

Others imprisoned for independent religious activities such as Alexander Ogorodnikov, remained in labour camps.

Other religious groups also suffered persecution and the penal conditions to which believers were subjected continued to be harsh in the extreme. Soviet law requires any such groups to register with the authorities and aims to ensure that they play no part in the wider community except when called upon to support official policies or deny reports of oppression. Members of unregistered Baptist groups were harassed as were unofficial activists of the Russian Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Uniate Catholic Church remained proscribed organisations. The period was marked by continued efforts of Lithuanian Catholics to recover use of several of their most venerated churches which had been seized by the authorities. The Soviet authorities continued to exert steady pressure to encourage Muslim inhabitants of Central Asia and Azerbaidzhan to abandon their religion, although Soviet sources suggested that such efforts were not particularly successful. Very few mosques in these regions were open for use and there were few officially recognised clergy. Muslim clergy not sanctioned by the authorities were attacked in the official press. Even tiny religious groups were not immune to pressure. Hare Krishna followers in particular suffered arrest, persecution and confinement to psychiatric hospitals. They have been refused permission to register formally as religious communities.

During the period under review, members of the "Group to Establish Trust Between the USSR and USA" continued to be subject to official harassment and arrest. Trust group member Larisa Chukayeva was sentenced in July to two years general-regime labour camp and deprived of parental rights over her child. However, she was reportedly released in December as was another member, Nina Kovalenko, who had again been committed to a mental hospital in October after trying to demonstrate on behalf of the arrested United States journalist, Nicholas Daniloff. This was another example of the continued abuse of psychiatry.

There were a number of promising developments, most notably the decision announced by Gorbachev personally on 16 December to permit Dr. Sakharov and his wife to return to Moscow from Gorky without laying down any conditions. In addition, there was the permission granted for a long-term victim of psychiatric abuse, Nikolai Baranov, to emigrate to the United Kingdom in August; the sudden release from prison in October of Irina Ratushinskaya, a poetess from the Ukraine and the

permission granted to her and her husband to come to the United Kingdom in December; the release of Yuri Orlov, the founder of a Helsinki monitoring group; the emigration permission granted to a few well-known refusniks such as the Medvedkovs and the family of Natan Sharansky and to Dr. Vladimir Brodsky, founder of the trust group. But many other well-known individuals continued to suffer imprisonment and harassment. Dr. Koryagin who helped to expose the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes remained in prison and in ill health.

Bulgarian implementation of CSCE commitments remained poor. Bulgaria continued to violate principle VII on respect for human rights. The practise of religion, in particular that of Islam, remained difficult with Moslem rights restricted or forbidden. The Bulgarian authorities also continued to exert total control over all other religious communities and to limit their rights to practise their beliefs. Recent reports suggest that the general situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria remains profoundly unsatisfactory in most areas including culture, religion, education and information.

Czechoslovak performance on CSCE implementation remained unsatisfactory. Concern was heightened by the arrest in September of seven leading members of the Jazz section.

CSCE documents and other material relevant to the fulfilment of Czechoslovakia's CSCE commitments were confiscated from the section's offices. Freedom of conscience remained severely restricted and access to information tightly controlled. The right to know and act upon human rights was similarly restricted.

The East German implementation record, whilst showing improvements in some areas, remained on the whole unsatisfactory. Restrictions on human rights and individual freedoms remained a central problem. Although a larger number of East German citizens below pensionable age were allowed to visit the West, the GDR authorities continued to limit severely travel to non-Communist countries, and to use force if necessary to stop individuals who wish to exercise their right to leave the country; on 24 November East German border guards shot and probably killed a young man trying to enter the Western sectors of Berlin from the GDR. Compared with some other Warsaw pact countries, the Church enjoyed considerable freedom of movement, although Christians continued to face problems and discrimination. The GDR continued to be highly restrictive in the dissemination of information and working conditions of journalists remained unsatisfactory.

Overall Hungarian compliance with CSCE commitments remained good in comparison with other East European states. Relations between churches and the state remained harmonious. However, freedom of expression was still limited and selective action taken against potential internal opposition.

Human rights in Poland have improved somewhat in the last six months. A new clemency law in July led to the release of political detainees (although those people charged with offences such as terrorism and espionage which may have been politically motivated, remain in prison). The authorities also made available non-custodial penalties for more political offences. A new social consultative council was established in December and there are proposals to create ombudsmen. These steps are all welcome, although the prospects for permanent improvement remain uncertain. There continued to be a high degree of religious freedom in Poland and few impediments to foreign travel. In spite of censorship, the level of real debate in the press remained relatively high.

The human rights situation in Romania has deteriorated even further. Basic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly were ruthlessly denied. The practice of religious belief continued to be circumscribed by the authorities. Members of religious groups who did not keep within the strict limits prescribed were liable to harassment and arrest and in some cases beatings. Travel in general became more difficult and contacts with foreigners were discouraged.

Confidence and Security-Building Measures

Two major military manoeuvres were notified by Warsaw pact countries in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act: one in the GDR from 8-13 September and one in Czechoslovakia from 10-12 September: observers were invited to the latter exercise only. The principal development in the area of confidence-building measures was the adoption of the Stockholm document on 19 September. This represents a significant step forward from the modest confidence-building measures in the Helsinki Final Act. The main elements of the document are:

(i) the annual exchange of forecasts of military activities;

(ii) notice 42 days in advance of military activities involving at least 13,000 troops or 300 tanks;

(iii) notice 42 days in advance of amphibious or airborne activities involving at least 3,000 troops;

(iv) mandatory invitation of observers to all military activities involving at least 17,000 troops, or to amphibious or airbone activities involving at least 5,000 troops;

(v) on-site inspection from the ground, from the air or both.

Co-operation in the field of economics, of science and technology and of the environment (Basket II)

In general, little improvement occurred in the conditions for conducting business in Eastern Europe, with Western business men confronted by considerable obstacles of a purely practical nature. The same bureaucratic foreign trade structure have continued to prevail which, because of tedious procedures and delays, discourages many foreign business interests. Poor economic and trade performance in some countries, coupled with a general tendency to secrecy, have resulted in an unwillingness to publish information and statistical data, although the Soviet Union published for the first time figures for the harvest for the last five years. Much more important data, for example on hard currency resources, remains unavailable. However, a law providing for joint ventures came into force in Poland in July and the Soviet Union has shown signs of changing its laws to facilitate joint ventures; and to loosen its state monopoly on foreign trade and facilitate access to end users in some areas.

Co-operation in Humanitarian and other fields (Basket III)

Most East European countries continued to show a largely negative record in the fields of family visits, family reunification and contacts with individuals from states outside the Warsaw Pact. Hungary and Poland were notable exceptions. Overall, emigration to the West continued at a low level. In the Soviet Union exit visas were difficult to obtain and persons applying for exit visas continued to suffer discrimination and harassment by the authorities. New legislation governing entry to, and exit from, the USSR was passed in August (to come into effect

on 1 January 1987). It was criticised by many refuseniks and others for containing restrictive wording and failing to close loopholes permitting arbitrary decisions. Family reunifications were still a problem and a hard core of cases remained unresolved. The Czechoslovak situation regarding family visits also remained unsatisfactory. Romania in particular took steps to discourage contacts with foreigners. With very few exceptions restrictions remained in force in all Warsaw pact countries on individuals wishing to visit the West, as well as on access to Western diplomatic missions.

Censorship and lack of information for the general public continued to be a dominant festure in Warsaw pact countries, although the record varied from country to country. Interference with Western broadcasts continued, especially by the Soviet Union, which consistently jammed BBC Russian and Polish service broadcasts on short wave. Availability of Western newspapers also continued to be limited.

Co-operation and exchanges in the field of culture and education

Bureaucratic and economic restraints continued to be the main impediments to active bilateral relations. On the whole, existing agreements and projects were implemented in a satisfactory manner, although Romania reduced its cultural exchanges and narrowed its co-operation with Western nations in the educational sphere.

Middle East (United Nations Peace Conference)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what vote was cast by Her Majesty's Government at the United Nations General Assembly on 4 December 1986 as regards the preparations to be made for an international peace conference on the middle east.

Mr. Renton: On 4 December, in the company of most of our European partners, we voted against an UNGA resolution (41/162A) on the situation in the middle east, which, inter alia, called for an international conference and the convening of a preparatory committee, because of the resolution, lack of balance and immoderate language. On 2 December we abstained on UNGA resolution 41/43D which specifically addressed the question of an international conference.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Mentally Handicapped People

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made so far with regard to the care-in-the-community policy in-so-far as it concerns the mentally handicapped; and if he will make a statement on the short and long term financial implications of this policy.

Mrs. Currie: Substantial progress has been made. The majority of mentally handicapped people continue to live with their families or independently, usually supported by local authority, health and voluntary services. The number of mentally handicapped people living in hospitals has been falling steadily for many years while numbers living elsewhere, including local authority and local authority sponsored accommodation, and small NHS units in the community, have risen. The provision of local authority day services has increased. Relevant figures are available in my Department's various publications on health and personal social services statistics, copies of which are available in the Library.

Estimated gross current expenditure on mental handicap in-patient services amounted to £461 million in 1984-85, an increase in real terms of around 13 per cent. over 1978-79, reflecting an increase in staff-patient ratio. Personal Social Services gross current expenditure (including joint finance) on residential and day care services for mentally handicapped people has also increased steadily in real terms and stood at some £241 million in 1984-85, an increase in real terms of around 54 per cent. over 1978-79. 1984-85 figures are provisional.

Community care is not a cheap option and is not intended to be. These figures illustrate both the improvements which have been achieved and the money invested in making them happen. Health authorities' strategic plans envisage continued growth in overall expenditure on mentally handicapped people. Social security costs will inevitably rise as normal benefits replace the personal allowances paid in hospital.

The provisional figure for personal social services provision in the rate support grant settlement for 1987-88 includes an extra £27 million for the development of community care generally. Decisions on priorities for local government spending are the responsibility of individual local authorities.

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy with regard to the degree of local authority involvement in care-in-the-community developments in so far as they affect the mentally handicapped; what financial provision he expects local authorities to make in the realisation of this project; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Social services departments have been encouraged to play an increasingly important role with regard to care in the community developments. The long-standing policy is to develop a comprehensive range of co-ordinated health and social services for mentally handicapped people and their families, including assessment, day services and long-term and respite residential care in each locality, and to achieve a major shift from institutional care for mentally handicapped people to a range of community care provided by the statutory, voluntary and private sectors according to individual needs, with a corresponding shift of resources.

At the same time the continued run-down of large mental handicap hospitals will proceed, but specialised residential health provision, which may be in small units in the community, will continue to be needed for people with special medical or nursing needs, as well as specialist health support for those in other settings.

The business of recognising the changing needs of mentally handicapped people is a multi-disciplinary and multi-authority one. The balance between authorities may shift, from time to time and from individual to individual, but the basic point of contingent responsibilities remains. Authorities should listen to mentally handicapped people and their families and, as far as possible, offer them choices which are genuine and explicit.

The priority for mental handicap services has been emphasised in successive policy documents and regional review letters to Chairmen of Regional Health Authorities, available in the Library, and is explained with fuller

comment on policies in the Government's response to the report of the House of Commons Social Services Committee on Community Care (Cmnd. 9674).

Under the care in the community arrangements health authorities can transfer funds for as long as necessary to pay local authorities or, with the agreement of local authorities, voluntary organisations, for community care for people moving out of hospital. In addition, NHS joint finance enables health authorities and local authorities to launch jointly planned schemes for mentally handicapped people.

Priorities for increased spending by local authorities are for local decision but we would hope the additional provision for care in the community developments included in the 1987-88 Rate Support Grant Settlement and the potential availability of resources from NHS authorities will enable local authorities to continue to give priority to the development of community services for mentally handicapped people.

Pensions

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of the total number of people in the United Kingdom in receipt of *(a)* supplementary pension only, *(b)* public sector pension, *(c)* retirement pension and *(d)* retirement pension and supplementary pension, for each of the years 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Lyell: The information available is as follows:

Great Britain (Thousands)

	1985	*1986*
Supplementary pension only	89	94
United Kingdom public sector pension	NA	NA
Retirement pension[1,2]	8,223	8,323
Retirement pension and supplementary pension[3]	1,339	1,298

[1] Includes pensioners receiving supplementary pension by separate order book.
[2] Includes those resident overseas.
[3] Combined order book cases.
NA Not available.
Sources: RP and WB* Biannual Enquiry; Supplementary Benefit annual and quarterly statistical enquiries.
* Widows' Benefit.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the annual growth of expenditure needed by the hospital and community services in each of the next five years in order to keep pace with the increase in the number of the elderly, medical advances and improved services; and what increase in expenditure has been in fact committed to meet the expected growth in the current year.

Mr. Newton: Expenditure on the hospital and community health services in 1987-88 will increase in cash terms by 6·0 per cent., which is some 2·2 per cent. above forecast general inflation. In addition authorities are expected to release some £150 million (1¼ per cent.) cash as a result of planned cost improvements. From within these total additional resources they will be expected to meet all pay and price increases arising in the year and to meet the additional costs arising from demographic change and from implementation of specific policy objectives.

The estimated increases in expenditure required to keep pace with demographic change are set out in the table. Increases in activity arising from medical advance are estimated to absorb in the region of half a per cent. of resources annually. The level of spending required to improve services will depend on decisions as to specific policy objectives over the period. In the current year these are estimated at some half of one per cent.

Year	*Percentage increase over previous year to meet demographic changes*
1987-88	1·0
1988-89	1·0
1989-90	1·0
1990-91	0·9
1991-92	0·7

Eye Consultants (Waiting Times)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the waiting time for initial referral by doctors to eye consultants in each of the hospitals in the Tameside district health authority, Stockport district health authority and each of the Manchester district health authorities; if he will give a breakdown by named consultants; and what is the average number of referrals being dealt with by each consultant.

Mr. Newton: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. No information is held centrally on numbers awaiting out-patient appointments. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairmen of the district health authorities concerned who may be able to provide the information requested.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on 12 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *286*, indicating for various income bands the entitlement to standard housing benefit of a one-child family with one working partner, he will indicate what figure was used in calculating the benefit amounts listed in the table for the amount of housing benefit included in the family income.

Mr. Lyell: I am not sure which figure the hon. Member is seeking. In answering his earlier question we carried out the normal standard housing benefit calculation as follows:

(a) the weekly rent was £16·00, so the 60 per cent. starting point was £9·60;
(b) the needs allowance applicable to a one-child family was £85·45;
(c) the various income bands were converted to weekly amounts by dividing by 52; the earnings disregard of £17·30 was then subtracted to give assessable income;
(d) the starting point at *(a)* was then increased or decreased by the appropriate taper; 25 per cent. of the difference between the assessable income and the needs allowance for the first three bands, whose

income was below the needs allowance; and 29 per cent. of the difference for the last two bands, whose income was above;

(c) finally, the minimum payment rule of 50 pence was applied in the case of the last income band.

Incontinence

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that resources are available to ensure that every person suffering from, or suspected as suffering from, incontinence receives a medical and nursing assessment; what information he has about variations from one part of the country to another in this regard; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We would expect each health district to have arrangements for multi-disciplinary assessment for people suffering from incontinence. We do not collect information about the precise form of clinical services, and it is for individual authorities to decide for themselves how best to allocate their resources to meet their local needs and circumstances.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evaluations have been made on the quality of the goods used in the management of incontinence; what evaluation units have been set up within his Department; what are proposed in assessing the quality of goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Two evaluations carried out under the DHSS aids assessment programme were reported on in 1982-83. These covered incontinence garments and incontinence aids for handicapped children.

More recently, an evaluation study of incontinence pads and garments was funded by the Department at the department of geriatric medicine, University College hospital medical school. The report of this study was published in the Health Equipment Information series (No. 159, October 1986). Further work is being undertaken and will be reported in due course.

Discussions are in progress with a view to establishing an evaluation unit to undertake a programme of assessments of incontinence products. The need for such assessment is recognised as an important means of achieving the most effective use of the significant resources devoted to this area.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what support his Department is giving to the research into uro-dynamic investigation; if he will provide funds for the establishment of regional uro-dynamic investigation units; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Uro-dynamic investigation is an established part of urological practice. It would be for health authorities to decide on the need for regional uro-dynamic investigation units and to fund them from their allocated resources.

Research in this field may be undertaken in academic departments of urology and other departments with urological interests. The Department is not supporting such research centrally, but I understand that basic urological research is being supported by the Medical Research Council, which is the main government-funded agency for medical and biological research in the United Kingdom and receives its grant-in-aid through the science budget of the Department of Education and Science.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what advice his Department gives to general practitioners and hospital authorities regarding the treatment of incontinence caused by constipation; what investigations his Department has done on the subject of bowel management and faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what guidelines his Department gives with regard to the management of bowel problems by non-skilled and untrained assistants in geriatric units and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: General guidance on the management of incontinence is given in the handbook of guidelines "Improving Geriatric Care in Hospital" and the memorandum of guidance "Residential homes for the elderly—Arrangements for Health Care".

Guidance for general practitioners will be included in a training package under development as part of the Department's Helping the Community to Care programme.

In geriatric units, a trained nurse will have the responsibility for planning the care of patients. Tasks undertaken by nursing auxiliaries should be under the direction and observation of the nurse.

In residential homes, care assistants should be under the supervision of trained staff. Advice and guidance on health care should be available from the resident's own general practitioner and the community nursing service.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department will provide courses for general practitioners to assist them to recognise overflow incontinence in the case of severely constipated patients who are referred to geriatric hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: No; but I refer the hon. Member to the reply given him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 13 January 1987 at columns *172-173* in which he pointed to the role of regional general practice educational sub-committees.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services who is responsible for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence and its treatment in all forms; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Arrangements for co-ordinating and advising on the problems of incontinence, its treatment and the provision of services are best left to individual health and local authorities. Many authorities have appointed continence advisers to carry out these functions, following advice given by the Department's Chief Nursing Officer in 1977 that the management of incontinence should be clearly identified as the responsibility of a designated special nurse. For individuals suffering incontinence, advice on treatment and management of the problem should be sought from their general practitioner, district nurse or health visitor.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assistance his Department is giving to the Disabled Living Foundation and other voluntary organisations concerned with the care, treatment and cure of incontinent people; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department makes an annual grant towards the costs of the five main services provided by the Disabled Living Foundation, including its Incontinence

Advisory Service. It is for the foundation to decide how to divide the grant between the five services. I understand that in the last completed financial year, 1985-86, the Foundation allocated £28,380 to the Incontinence Advisory Service.

Under the "Helping the Community to Care" programme, the Department is funding a three-year project being run by Age Concern (England) to develop a pack of detailed advisory leaflets for those suffering from incontinence and for their carers. This pack should be of significant benefit not only to individuals but also to voluntary organisations which help with the problem.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what developments have taken place regarding the care of incontinent people in the community, in homes and in hospital since April 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 13 January 1987 at columns *173-74* and to my other replies to him today, in which reference is made to general guidance on the management of incontinence, to the growth in numbers of continence advisers, to the assessment of incontinence aids and garments, and to the research which has been carried out. These and other relevant developments will be reviewed at the seminar planned for February 1987.

Bowel Problems

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department will promote a research programme and study of the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals who are suffering from mental confusion caused by faecal impaction; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The results of research on faecal incontinence are widely available and there does not seem to be any particular need for additional study at the present time. Mental confusional states can arise from and be influenced by many different physical causes. This is particularly true of elderly people whatever the setting, and bowel functioning can influence and be influenced by mental state. So the identification and treatment of these and other physical conditions are an essential part of accepted good clinical practice in mental illness hospitals as in other settings.

Careful assessment of the physical state of people who are mentally ill, particularly the elderly, is important and for this reason the Department has provided guidance to health authorities recommending close working links between medical services for the elderly and for the elderly mentally ill. It also recommends the location of units as part of the acute services in the district general hospital for the assessment and treatment of elderly mentally ill people.

AIDS

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating the spread of AIDS.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend outlined the progress made in this country and our plans for further action in his speech during the debate on AIDS in the House on 21 November.

In the European Community proposals have been developed for coordinated research as part of the fourth general Community medical research programme 1987-1989. Member States have also cooperated with other international organisations, notably the WHO collaborating Centre on AIDS in Paris, which published on 5 December its latest report on "AIDS Surveillance in Europe."

The European Council on 5-6 December asked the Council of Ministers and the Commission to ensure effective exchange of information in the Community about the spread of AIDS, its prevention and treatment, and to consider further cooperative measures.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if the new pamphlet on AIDS is being distributed to (i) prisoners, (ii) hospital patients and (iii) patients attending drug and veneral disease clinics;

(2) what steps he is taking to distribute the pamphlet his Department has produced on AIDS to homeless people.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Office, is arranging to distribute copies of the AIDS leaflet to prisoners.

We are supplying all doctors, nurses and hospital managers with copies of the leaflet, and making them available also to retail pharmacists. We are also producing a poster version of the leaflet for use in waiting rooms.

The leaflet will shortly be available in post offices and is being offered to such public outlets as libraries and Citizens Advice Bureaux. These are natural points of collection for homeless people, and we are also examining the possible role of appropriate voluntary organisations.

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the incidence of AIDS by ethnic grouping.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 December 1986, c. *294*]: The records do not show the ethnic origin of all acquired immune deficiency syndrome patients in the United Kingdom, but such information as we have to November 1986 is as follows:

White 466
Non-White 17
Not Stated 116

Retirement Pensioners

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many retirement pensioners were of the age of 80 years and above at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: About 1·8 million at March 1986.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the current rate of supplement to the basic rate of retirement pension for those aged 80 years and above if that supplement had been indexed to the cost of living since its introduction in 1971.

Mr. Major: If the age addition of 25 pence had been increased in line with the increase in the retail price index since its introduction in September 1971, it would have risen to £1·15 in July 1986.

Communications Aids Centre, West Bromwich

Miss Boothroyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to continue the partial funding of the communications aids centre in West Bromwich; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Central funding for the West Bromwich (Sandwell) communications aids centre was made available by the Department and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation on a pump-priming basis only, for the five-year period 1 April 1982 to 31 March 1987. It was a condition for receiving funding that Sandwell health authority would take over full funding with effect from 1 April 1987.

Drink-vending Machines

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what guidelines he has issued to general practitioners and consultants treating diabetics and sufferers from peptic ulcers in relation to the presence of dried milk in drink-vending machines;

(2) whether he will encourage the display of health warning notices on drink-vending machines for diabetics and sufferers from peptic ulcers, due to the high sugar level of creamers used.

Mrs. Currie: "Whiteners" in vending machines can contain a variety of substances, including glucose and dried milk. Doctors are aware of this and if they feel that these substances may be a danger to their patients it is for them to give appropriate dietary advice. Any guidelines would be for the medical profession rather than the Department. We do not feel that health warnings on vending machines are necessary.

Population Statistics (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many recipients of supplementary benefit in Dundee in 1981 were one-parent families.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that this information is not available.

Care in the Community

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the finding of the recent report from the Audit Commission for Local Authorities for England and Wales that the Government's care in the community policy is wasteful, disorganised and causing unnecessary suffering to elderly and disabled people.

Mrs. Currie: The Government's view is that substantial progress has already been made in carrying forward the policy of community care which has been accepted by successive Governments. We cannot accept that the Audit Commission's Report properly reflects this progress. However we recognise that there are still problems to be solved, and my right hon. Friend announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 16 December 1986 at columns *461-62* that he had asked Sir Roy Griffiths to undertake an overview of community care policy.

Hypothermia

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue a special circular to DHSS offices and to local authority social services departments concerning the danger during cold weather of hypothermia amongst the elderly and very young.

Mrs. Currie: Local authority social services departments and the National Health Service have, over many years, developed systems and skills to enable them to react to the danger of hypothermia during periods of cold weather. The staff of DHSS local offices are also aware of the dangers of hypothermia, and would be able to offer advice on benefits if they came across a potential case during the course of a home visit. The Health Education Council, which is funded by the Government, makes available each year, in conjunction with Age Concern, an advisory leaflet on hypothermia for elderly people, and has recently launched a detailed training package on hypothermia aimed at health and social services staff. In the light of this, we do not consider that there is a need for a special circular.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the daily mean temperature and *(b)* the weekly mean temperature for each of the weather stations used for calculating severe weather payments for the week 12 January to 18 January.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many severe weather payments were made in 1986 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales; what was the total amount involved in each country; and what was the average individual payment in each country.

Mr. Major: Final returns showing the number and cost of severe weather payments made in 1986 are still awaited from a few local offices in England and Scotland. The latest information available is as follows:

Country	*Number of payments*	*Amount paid* £	*Average payment* £
England	333,076	8,622,037	25·89
Scotland	84,181	1,926,689	22·89
Wales[1]	38,769	1,039,294	26·81

[1] Final figures.

Final figures for England and Scotland may not be available for some weeks, but it is unlikely that they will be substantially different from those given in the table.

Child Benefit

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest available figures for the number of households in receipt of child benefit in the Thurrock constituency.

Mr. Lyell: Child benefit is administered centrally and there is no information specific to Thurrock.

Pensioners (Thurrock)

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest available figures for the number of pensioners in receipt

of the state pension in the Thurrock constituency, giving the number of single pensioners, and the number of married couples.

Mr. Lyell: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Statistics are not held on pensioner numbers by parliamentary constituency.

School Clothing (Payments)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the number of applications for discretionary payments made by families of school-age children in Scotland for the provision of school clothing that have been rejected by local offices of his Department in the period 1981 to 1986.

Mr. Major: I regret I am unable to supply the information requested as the existing statistics on the number of rejected single payment claims do not separately identify the item(s) for which the payment was refused.

NHS (Staff Statistics)

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will set out the numbers of *(a)* midwives, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* nurses in the National Health Service in England and Wales in 1978 and at the latest date for which figures are available; and whether he will provide a similar breakdown for the numbers in the four Thames regional health authorities for the same years.

Mr. Newton: The figures for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. The other figures requested are shown in the following table. Figures for September 1985 are the latest available to this level of detail.

National Health Service Doctors, Nursing Staff and Midwifery Staff—England and the four Thames Regions

Whole-Time Equivalents[1]

	England	*North West Thames*	*North East Thames*	*South East Thames*	*South West Thames*	*Thames Regions*[4] [5]
30 September 1978						
Nursing Staff[2] [3]	327,610	24,440	29,040	27,170	21,160	101,810
Midwifery Staff [2] [3]	20,020	1,450	1,920	1,600	1,040	6,010
Doctors[4]	33,800	3,050	3,120	2,850	2,110	11,140
30 September 1985						
Nursing Staff [2]	374,220	25,900	31,880	28,250	23,000	109,040
Midwifery Staff[2]	22,810	1,470	1,830	1,700	1,200	6,200
Doctors[4]	38,850	3,050	3,800	3,100	2,270	12,220

Notes:

[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) Whole-Time Equivalent.

[2] Excludes agency staff.

[3] Figures not adjusted to take account of the change in Nurses working hours in 1980 (from 40 to 37·5 hours).

[4] Includes Hospital Practitioners and part-time medical officers (clinical assistants). Excludes locums. Excludes occasional sessional staff in Community Health Service.

[5] Due to restructuring of the NHS in 1982, figures for the four Thames Regions in 1978 and 1985 are not strictly comparable.

Source: DHSS Annual Census of Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.

Heating Additions

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in 1984 were in receipt of a heating addition in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales; and what was the total expenditure in each country on heating additions.

Mr. Major: The total expenditure in each country on heating additions is not available but it is estimated that total expenditure in Great Britain in 1984-85 was approximately £400 million. I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible on the number of people in receipt of a heating addition in each country.

Expert Advisory Committees

Sir Philip Holland asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *420*, when he expects to reply in full to the hon. Member for Gedling's question on expert advisory committees.

Mrs. Currie: I replied to my hon. Friend yesterday.

Local Offices

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of benefit offices which have closed for *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of this past week due to the severe weather conditions.

Mr. Lyell: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Food Poisoning

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of food poisoning have arisen in *(a)* Wakefield and *(b)* Yorkshire in each of the past five years which originated abroad; and what further steps he intends to take to seek to protect people travelling abroad from contracting food poisoning.

Mrs. Currie: The statistics requested are not readily available. Advice to travellers on taking care with certain foods is included in the Department's leaflet—SA 35—"Protect Your Health Abroad." Two million copies are issued annually. A copy is available in the Library.

Proguaril Hydrochloride

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the supply of proguaril hydrochloride, the anti-malarial drug, in the Greater London area.

Mrs. Currie: None.

Overseas Voters

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many overseas voters have been registered for each United Kingdom parliamentary constituency.

Mrs. Currie: The information required will not be available centrally until the end of April 1987. Overseas voters were not eligible to vote prior to the compilation of the 1986 register. As a result of changes in the regulations (The Representation of Peoples Act 1985) by the Home Office which followed a report by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, some people resident overseas can now vote. The 1986 register is the first to be affected.

Slimming Aids

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figures of net expenditure on slimming aids and prophylactics, respectively, provided by the National Health Service for the last four complete years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 16 January 1987]: Full information is not available in the form requested. The costs to the family practitioner services of slimming aids supplied by chemists are:

Net ingredient cost of appetite suppressants (England)

Year	*Bulk forming types* £	*Centrally active types* £
1982	360,000	2,020,000
1983	260,000	1,840,000
1984	250,000	1,560,000
1985	270,000	1,260,000

The corresponding expenditure in the hospital and community health services is not collected centrally.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the number of patients on the high priority waiting list for kidney transplants in May 1986 and *(b)* the number of patients on that list who have since been found matching kidneys for transplant.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 16 January 1987]: In May 1986 there were eight patients on the United Kingdom Transplant Service's "clinically urgent" list for kidney transplant (those patients whose consultants considered them unlikely to survive more than about four weeks without a transplant). Six have since had transplants, one was removed from the list as unsuitable for transplant and one died while waiting for a suitably matched kidney.

DEFENCE

Military Convoy (Accident)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department dispatched to the scene of the convoy accident in Wiltshire on 10 January a recovery vehicle which was unable to lift the crashed transporter vehicle.

Mr. Stanley: The crane used to right the vehicle involved in the accident completed the operation successfully.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the officers in command of the Royal Air Force convoy involved in an accident in Wiltshire on 10 January knew *(a)* that the road leading to their destination had not been gritted, and *(b)* the exact weight of the transporter that crashed.

Mr. Stanley: As far as the first part of the hon. Member's question is concerned, the extent of the commander of the convoy's knowledge of the road conditions is a matter that will be addressed by the report of the Board of Inquiry. I understand that the vehicle involved in the accident weighed about 22·5 tons.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up an inquiry of Privy Councillors into the accident to the Royal Air Force convoy in Wiltshire on 10 January.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Nuclear Weapons (Germany)

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the types of nuclear weapons that are currently in the ownership of the 1st British Corps in West Germany;

(2) if he will list the types of nuclear weapons currently under the control of 1st British Corps in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: The British Army in the Federal Republic of Germany operates one regiment of Lance surface-to-surface missiles and five regiments of nuclear-capable artillery. The nuclear warheads for both the missiles and the artillery are owned by and in the custody of the USA.

Armed Forces (Staff Losses)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many pilots left the Royal Air Force in 1986 or have expressed a desire to leave the service.

Mr. Freeman: The number of pilots who left the RAF in 1986 was 175. The number of pilots who expressed a desire in 1986 to leave the service was 213. The latter figure includes those applying for premature voluntary retirement, those signifying their intention to leave at optional exit points and optional retirement dates, and those who have been offered assimilation to age 55 but have declined.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many pilots left the Royal Air Force during 1986 without completing their engagements.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of pilots who left the RAF during 1986 without completing their engagements are as follows:

	Number
(a) Through premature voluntary retirement	63
(b) At a recognised optional exit point	39
(c) Other exits (medical, death, disciplinary etc)	12
Total	114

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many pilots have expressed a desire to leave the Royal Air Force without completing their engagement.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of pilots who in 1986 expressed a desire to leave the RAF without completing their engagements are as follows:

	Number
a) Through premature voluntary retirement	119
b) At a recognised optional exit point	65
Total	184

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy flying observers have expressed a desire to leave the service without having completed their engagement.

Mr. Freeman: During 1986 a total of seven observers applied to leave the service, six through voluntary retirement without having completed their engagement and one by applying to take the optional eight-year break point for departure which is currently a condition of service for aircrew officers serving on a 12-year short career commission.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy helicopter pilots have expressed a desire to leave the service without having completed their engagement.

Mr. Freeman: During 1986 a total of 23 helicopter pilots applied to leave the service, 13 through voluntary retirement without having completed their engagement and 10 by applying to take their optional eight-year Break Point.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea Harrier pilots left the Royal Navy during 1986, or have expressed a desire to leave the service.

Mr. Freeman: During 1986 one Sea Harrier pilot left the Royal Navy as a result of an early voluntary retirement application and one left at the end of his Commission. There were no new voluntary retirement applications from Sea Harrier pilots during the year.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopter pilots have left the Royal Navy during 1986, or have expressed a desire to leave the service.

Mr. Freeman: During 1986 24 helicopter pilots left the Royal Navy. Of these, 12 left as a result of early voluntary retirement, five at their optional eight-year break point, five at the termination of their commissions; one was invalided out and one has died. In the same year a total of 23 helicopter pilots applied to leave the service. Of these, 13 applied for early voluntary retirement and 10 to leave at their optional eight-year break point.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying observers left the Royal Navy during 1986, or have expressed a desire to leave the service.

Mr. Freeman: During 1986 a total of 10 observers left the Royal Navy. of these, two left as a result of early voluntary retirement, two applied to leave at their optional eight-year break point and six left at the termination of their commissions. In the same year a total of seven Observers applied to leave the service, six through early voluntary retirements and one at his optional eight-year break point.

Tornado F3 Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3 aircraft are currently with the F3 operational conversion unit.

Mr. Stanley: It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3 aircraft are now in squadron service.

Mr. Stanley: The first Tornado F3 Squadron is expected to form later this year. It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3 aircraft have now been fitted with Foxhunter radar.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Sufficient Foxhunter radars have been fitted to Tornado air defence variant aircraft to support the Operational Conversion Unit which formed last year. It is not our practice to reveal numbers of aircraft in operational units.

British Forces in Germany (Costs)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the total annual cost of British forces in Berlin;

(2) what is the total annual cost of British forces in West Germany;

(3) what is the annual cost of the British Army of the Rhine;

(4) what is the annual cost of the Royal Air Force in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: The estimated costs for 1986-87 are shown below:

Commitment	*Estimates 1986-87 prices £ million*
BAOR (including reinforcement forces)	2,550
RAF Germany (including reinforcement forces)	897
Berlin	52
TOTAL (CENTRAL FRONT)	3,499

Armed Forces (Training)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force pilots graduated from RAF Valley during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: One hundred and seven..

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force pilots graduated from Royal Air Force Shawbury during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Thirty-three.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force pilots graduated from RAF Finningley during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Fifty-six.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men entered the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, to train as pilots during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Three hundred and twenty-nine.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men entered the Royal Air College, Cranwell to train for navigation during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: One hundred and forty-two.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many navigators graduated from Royal Air Force Finningley during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Eighty-five.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of training a fast jet navigator for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Freeman: The average cost to the Ministry of Defence of training a student navigator to the point when he joins an operational fast jet squadron is approximately £1 million (at 1984-85 prices).

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of training a fast jet pilot for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Freeman: The average cost to the Ministry of Defence of training a student pilot to the point when he joins an operational fast jet squadron is approximately £2·87 million (at 1984-85 prices).

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of training a Sea Harrier pilot.

Mr. Freeman: The cost of training a Sea Harrier pilot is approximately £3,700,000.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of training a Royal Navy helicopter pilot.

Mr. Freeman: Costs vary according to aircraft type and role, but the most usual form of helicopter pilot training in the Royal Navy, for Sea King ASW, costs approximately £530,000 per trainee.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of training a Royal Navy flying observer.

Mr. Freeman: The cost of training an observer in the Royal Navy is approximately £710,000.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men entered Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, to train as pilots with the Fleet Air Arm in 1986.

Mr. Freeman: In 1986, 68 trainees entered Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, to commence training as pilots with the Fleet Air Arm.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men entered Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, to train as flying observers with the Fleet Air Arm in 1986.

Mr. Freeman: In 1986, 87 trainees entered Britannia Naval College, Dartmouth, to commence training as observers with the Fleet Air Arm.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy officers graduated as flying observers during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Forty-one Royal Naval officers completed operational flying training as observers during 1986.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Naval officers graduated as helicopter pilots in 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Thirty- seven Naval officers completed operational flying training as helicopter pilots in 1986.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Naval officers graduated as Sea Harrier pilots during 1986.

Mr. Freeman: Eight Royal Naval officers completed operational flying training as Sea Harrier pilots during 1986.

Aircraft Development (Funding)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what funding has so far been given by his Department for developing the advanced short take-off and vertical landing aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom and United States Governments are participating in a jointly agreed but separately funded programme of studies into propulsion and control technologies for a possible advised short take-off and vertical landing aircraft. The United Kingdom contribution to this programme so far amounts to about £2 million.

Helicopters

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Wessex helicopters are currently in Royal Navy service;

(2) how many Wasp helicopters are currently in Royal Navy service;

(3) how many Sea King helicopters are in Royal Navy service;

(4) how many Lynx helicopters are in Royal Navy service.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to table 4 of annex C of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1986" (Cmnd. 9763-1). It is not our practice to reveal details of numbers of operational aircraft.

Allied Forces Baltic Approaches

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government have had any discussions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and with the Danish authorities on the possible ending or reduction of the United Kingdom commitment to deploy to the allied forces Baltic approaches in time of tension or war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The principal United Kingdom force currently assigned to strengthening the land defences of the Baltic approaches is the United Kingdom Mobile Force (Land). Because it is a self-sufficient expeditionary force, with a large number of deployment and employment options, this force inevitably has a disproportionately high level of support units. We are therefore discussing with NATO whether this contribution represents the most effective use of these resources. We have naturally kept the Danish authorities informed. Details of the discussions are confidential but it has been stressed that the United Kingdom has no intention of making unilateral changes to its commitment to the region.

Type 23 Frigate

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the command and control system for the type 23 frigate.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 19 January 1987.

Air Vice Marshal Robson

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present role within his Department of Air Vice Marshal R. Robson; and what was his last posting.

Mr. Freeman: Air Vice Marshal R. M. Robson became head of the RAF study of officers' terms of service as from 19 January this year. From 20 July 1984 to January 16 last he was Director of Public Relations (RAF) in the rank of Air Commodore.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the future of Devonport dockyard.

Mr. Younger [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *778*]: I am now satisfied that there exists the basis for an advantageous contract to be placed for the future operation of Devonport dockyard with Devonport Management Limited, a consortium formed by Brown and Root (UK) Limited, the Weir Group plc and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Limited.

Under arrangements that have been negotiated to date, such a contract could offer the possibility of saving some £123 million over the seven-year term contract, with the prospect of annual savings thereafter of about £40 million under any subsequent contract. As with our preferred contractor for Rosyth dockyard, Babcock Thorn Limited, the contract with Devonport Management Limited would encourage improvements in efficiency and enable the contractor to compete for commercial and naval work with no possibility of cross-subsidy from the core programme of naval refitting.

As my hon. Friend knows, when I announced our preferred contractor for Rosyth dockyard on 4 December [*Official Report*, Vol. 106, c. *771-2*] I provided the trade unions with a full paper setting out the arguments in favour of commercial management, which I believe are valid both for Rosyth and Devonport, and providing information on the preferred contractor for Rosyth dockyard. I have invited trade union representatives to meet me again on 21 January before I take a final decision on the future management arrangements for Rosyth dockyard, and I have today provided further information to the trade unions summarising the main aspects of the draft contract arrangements negotiated with Devonport Management Limited. I will consider with the trades unions the question of additional time for them to make representations to me in respect of this latest paper before I take a final decision on the placing of a contract for the future operation of Devonport dockyard.

A copy of my latest paper for the trades unions has been placed in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 21 January 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Pay)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on whether teachers being paid at an unqualified rate can have the appropriate increase in their pay backdated once the education authority has received notification of qualified teacher status.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Under existing regulations that cannot be done. The matter is under consideration and I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

New Works (Funding)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funding for new works has been provided by his Department in each of the last five years; and how this has been distributed on a local education authority basis.

Mr. Dunn: Funding for local education authority capital expenditure is not provided by the Department, but is the responsibility of the LEAs. The level of capital spending they may undertake in any year is, however, limited to the allocation notified to them by the Department, plus the flexibilities permitted by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Table 1 lists each local education authority's allocation for each of the last five years. It is for the LEA to decide how its allocation should be spent.

The Department does provide grant-aid for capital projects undertaken by the governors of voluntary aided schools. Table 2 shows the amount of capital expenditure at such schools in its area, covering both commitments and new work, notified to each LEA as eligible for grant-aid in each of the last five years.

Table 1
Allocations for LEA prescribed expenditure 1983-84 to 1987-88

	1983-84 (£000's)	*1984-85 (£000's)*	*1985-86 (£000's)*	*1986-87 (£000's)*	*1987-88 (£000's)*
Barking	2,928	1,442	947	1,135	806
Barnet	1,538	2,453	2,612	1,621	1,744
Bexley	1,633	845	504	715	1,641
Brent	1,180	1,678	891	1,589	2,514
Bromley	841	492	628	1,747	1,618
Croydon	800	1,227	2,170	2,784	2,428
Ealing	693	1,347	2,451	2,154	2,147
Enfield	311	576	966	706	1,222
Haringey	1,597	1,090	895	797	1,121
Harrow	305	523	299	4,078	2,952
Havering	299	216	334	395	393
Hillingdon	896	1,068	521	306	1,059
Hounslow	2,611	3,063	1,566	668	1,255
Kingston-upon-Thames	2,270	1,330	2,131	1,806	1,683
Merton	408	993	2,277	1,203	1,054
Newham	2,084	2,039	2,558	1,271	1,165
Redbridge	872	1,006	1,330	1,149	1,761
Richmond-upon-Thames	557	735	379	249	115
Sutton	266	451	474	329	247
Waltham forest	1,624	889	985	2,184	2,585
Inner London	9,683	9,703	15,080	12,575	14,957
Birmingham	5,220	6,484	3,695	5,016	3,860
Coventry	3,478	2,919	3,094	5,396	5,709
Dudley	3,950	3,516	2,671	2,012	1,329
Sandwell	1,436	1,705	1,914	1,203	576
Solihull	356	723	642	1,295	500
Walsall	1,340	1,026	1,329	1,119	824
Wolverhampton	2,269	2,375	2,047	1,418	1,932
Knowsley	665	895	973	1,483	1,108
Liverpool	3,768	4,243	4,870	2,904	1,885
St Helens	2,384	2,111	1,827	772	855
Sefton	578	824	1,671	2,667	1,790
Wirral	2,403	2,117	766	1,402	1,316
Bolton	2,047	1,536	570	576	645
Bury	982	1,030	803	882	320
Manchester	4,349	6,997	7,450	6,501	8,968
Oldham	780	968	1,014	1,428	2,799
Rochdale	1,174	1,452	1,802	2,163	2,220
Salford	1,038	822	1,551	1,625	1,882
Stockport	1,067	1,770	1,411	1,453	1,243

	1983-84 (£000's)	1984-85 (£000's)	1985-86 (£000's)	1986-87 (£000's)	1987-88 (£000's)
Tameside	1,871	1,690	532	306	389
Trafford	693	1,027	1,594	1,276	1,064
Wigan	2,518	2,004	1,464	2,339	2,717
Barnsley	384	401	1,090	577	530
Doncaster	1,386	1,226	424	338	365
Rotherham	515	471	481	578	287
Sheffield	3,439	3,007	3,497	2,330	3,197
Bradford	6,969	6,707	8,269	7,061	6,303
Calderdale	1,293	1,090	830	1,203	1,883
Kirklees	4,102	3,753	3,304	1,956	1,664
Leeds	3,381	2,899	3,325	2,634	2,802
Wakefield	2,044	1,596	1,438	1,990	2,074
Gateshead	1,003	572	1,122	1,451	1,112
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,134	2,265	1,716	2,586	3,369
North Tyneside	606	721	2,235	1,536	1,935
South Tyneside	1,181	1,280	1,339	732	1,932
Sunderland	2,927	2,862	3,047	1,928	2,305
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	30
Avon	5,853	5,270	3,951	4,070	4,386
Bedfordshire	2,437	2,439	1,625	1,934	1,248
Berkshire	8,826	8,227	7,490	5,399	3,597
Buckinghamshire	6,605	6,854	5,978	5,582	6,004
Cambridgeshire	6,370	5,039	4,387	2,591	3,399
Cheshire	8,213	7,366	5,005	3,837	5,043
Cleveland	4,009	3,626	4,493	4,933	4,351
Cornwall	5,548	4,377	3,319	3,592	5,645
Cumbria	2,618	3,982	3,803	2,254	2,852
Derbyshire	6,849	6,546	7,239	7,202	9,036
Devon	4,817	7,832	6,405	8,418	4,734
Dorset	4,736	5,385	5,265	3,377	4,349
Durham	1,711	2,054	2,995	2,231	1,371
East Sussex	5,567	4,601	4,870	3,786	4,884
Essex	7,357	6,604	11,679	11,417	11,600
Gloucestershire	2,974	2,772	4,652	6,561	7,167
Hampshire	10,638	9,666	11,844	12,905	10,918
Hereford and Worcester	1,504	1,669	1,480	1,929	2,585
Hertfordshire	5,473	5,479	5,960	4,677	4,100
Humberside	7,133	6,883	4,138	7,524	10,753
Isle of Wight	541	948	1,230	1,139	1,375
Kent	4,821	4,347	5,209	6,405	7,514
Lancashire	11,069	11,055	15,156	12,538	5,994
Leicestershire	5,234	7,074	6,718	7,061	5,526
Lincolnshire	3,442	4,455	3,532	3,908	4,625
Norfolk	5,735	4,261	3,070	4,394	5,019
North Yorkshire	2,703	5,675	3,798	2,504	2,035
Northamptonshire	3,916	4,179	4,492	4,339	1,726
Northumberland	1,481	1,002	1,254	1,003	655
Nottinghamshire	2,493	2,666	3,421	3,043	2,379
Oxfordshire	4,014	3,245	3,650	2,055	1,942
Shropshire	2,727	2,072	3,924	2,602	5,257
Somerset	3,127	2,559	1,243	2,014	2,626
Staffordshire	7,676	10,691	9,717	9,313	7,591
Suffolk	3,752	4,348	3,871	5,866	6,683
Surrey	3,733	4,340	4,365	3,610	3,828
Warwickshire	1,991	1,428	1,703	1,236	1,101
West Sussex	3,705	5,027	3,429	2,157	1,739
Wiltshire	3,136	3,810	3,478	1,983	3,177

Table 2
Allocations for capital expenditure by governors of aided schools, 1983-84 to 1987-88 by LEA area

	1983-84 (£000's)	1984-85 (£000's)	1985-86 (£000's)	1986-87 (£000's)	1987-88 (£000's)
Barking	—	7	20	—	—
Barnet	192	1,091	1,662	400	880
Bexley	47	5	42	3	126
Brent	298	340	46	12	613
Bromley	80	32	211	—	20
Croydon	29	45	45	48	503
Ealing	350	340	341	331	762

	1983-84 (£000's)	1984-85 (£000's)	1985-86 (£000's)	1986-87 (£000's)	1987-88 (£000's)
Enfield	314	375	620	197	93
Haringey	58	60	425	323	75
Harrow	22	10	20	1	25
Havering	43	20	13	—	—
Hillingdon	131	175	67	40	230
Hounslow	76	190	324	169	153
Kingston-upon-Thames	168	190	71	44	—
Merton	119	20	118	170	65
Newham	10	15	25	47	60
Redbridge	454	555	695	28	5
Richmond-upon-Thames	19	100	—	—	12
Sutton	188	360	185	35	—
Waltham Forest	48	1,005	1,375	245	50
Inner London	2,416	1,590	3,477	1,686	862
Birmingham	622	182	1,070	615	985
Coventry	23	28	70	22	340
Dudley	603	417	666	724	858
Sandwell	26	10	25	—	15
Solihull	108	86	75	—	166
Walsall	533	50	25	26	50
Wolverhampton	78	185	30	6	8
Knowsley	105	110	190	600	570
Liverpool	1,440	1,275	2,080	2,360	2,239
St. Helens	30	32	63	6	888
Sefton	452	45	52	2	50
Wirral	155	470	615	416	322
Bolton	194	106	578	575	734
Bury	44	47	40	3	120
Manchester	704	1,145	1,602	2,250	2,831
Oldham	99	40	73	16	274
Rochdale	57	75	125	—	335
Salford	203	80	129	610	750
Stockport	323	40	269	447	122
Tameside	394	530	73	35	35
Trafford	42	60	40	—	30
Wigan	718	475	630	781	1,045
Barnsley	36	—	—	—	5
Doncaster	28	40	95	50	—
Rotherham	70	61	46	69	69
Sheffield	56	33	115	300	130
Bradford	835	60	350	320	270
Calderdale	145	230	151	3	25
Kirklees	121	254	180	16	14
Leeds	36	15	30	90	20
Wakefield	52	155	125	120	47
Gateshead	118	233	318	163	895
Newcastle upon Tyne	96	65	218	191	338
North Tyneside	109	285	429	20	275
South Tyneside	29	65	185	185	251
Sunderland	31	15	77	—	375
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—
Avon	352	144	391	193	885
Bedfordshire	41	15	40	—	4
Berkshire	86	145	62	265	593
Buckinghamshire	603	175	11	423	1,701
Cambridgeshire	196	395	87	127	465
Cheshire	568	652	867	836	393
Cleveland	116	213	200	135	130
Cornwall	360	35	176	252	116
Cumbria	156	300	528	401	596
Derbyshire	310	225	375	190	685
Devon	573	1,410	1,472	132	372
Dorset	84	610	135	216	1,267
Durham	181	258	448	425	449
East Sussex	43	35	640	380	1,630
Essex	184	215	467	150	120
Gloucestershire	406	285	366	252	442
Hampshire	48	40	60	70	130

	1983-84 (£000's)	1984-85 (£000's)	1985-86 (£000's)	1986-87 (£000's)	1987-88 (£000's)
Hereford and Worcester	115	650	793	1,399	654
Hertfordshire	244	295	209	46	457
Humberside	28	35	20	1,818	2,684
Isle of Wight	20	10	23	2	70
Kent	713	935	307	496	534
Lancashire	928	1,500	2,244	1,302	793
Leicestershire	274	705	928	1,241	592
Lincolnshire	195	177	160	3	65
Norfolk	479	180	177	89	41
North Yorkshire	183	580	1,890	273	45
Northamptonshire	245	90	44	505	205
Northumberland	107	35	40	—	110
Nottinghamshire	619	190	22	66	322
Oxfordshire	56	15	113	470	273
Salop	45	75	284	112	45
Somerset	8	30	30	22	50
Staffordshire	431	435	239	181	489
Suffolk	83	200	164	163	68
Surrey	315	50	68	10	1,079
Warwickshire	346	110	245	19	80
West Sussex	288	263	270	334	420
Wiltshire	40	12	62	29	35

Expenditure

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of gross domestic product has been spent on the education budget in each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The table shows total outturn public expenditure on education in the United Kingdom for the financial years 1979-80 to 1985-86 expressed as a percentage of average gross domestic product in each year, and estimated outturn for 1986-87 as a percentage of forecast GDP.

Financial years	Percentage
1979-80	5·1
1980-81	5·5
1981-82	5·4
1982-83	5·3
1983-84	5·2
1984-85	5·0
1985-86	4·7
1986-87	4·9

Committee on English

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is yet in a position to announce the membership and terms of reference of the Committee on English.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have appointed Sir John Kingman FRS, Vice-Chancellor of Bristol university, to be chairman of the committee which I am setting up to make recommendations on a model of the workings of the English language to help improve teaching in schools.

The members of the committee are:

Professor Gillian Brown
Professor in Applied Linguistics and Dean of the School of Social Studies, University of Essex.

Mrs. A. S. Byatt FRSL
Writer, broadcaster and reviewer. Former Senior Lecturer in English at University College, London.

Professor Brian Cox
John Edward Taylor Professor of English Literature, University of Manchester.

Mr. Leonard Ellis
Senior Lecturer in Education, North Riding College. Former primary school headteacher.

Mr. Patrick J. Kavanagh
Poet, novelist and author of children's books.

Mr. Richard Knott
General adviser with responsibility for English and drama, Berkshire LEA.

Mrs. Pramila Le Hunte
Head of English Department, the North London Collegiate School.

Professor Peter Levi FSA FRSL
Professor of Poetry, University of Oxford and Fellow of St. Catherine's College, Oxford.

Miss Patricia Mann
Head of External Affairs, J. Walter Thompson Group and Editor of "Consumer Affairs".

Mr. Robert Robinson
Writer and broadcaster.

Mrs. Jeanne Strickland
Head of English Department, Camden School for Girls, London.

Dr. Charles Suckling FRS
Chairman, Bradbury, Suckling and Partners Ltd., Scientific Consultants.

Mr. Keith Waterhouse
Journalist, novelist and playwright.

Professor Henry Widdowson
Professor of Education and Head of Department of English for Speakers of Other Languages, University of London Institute of Education.

The secretary is Mr. Peter Gannon, Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

The committee will start work very shortly and report within about a year. Its terms of reference are to recommend:

a model of the English language, whether spoken or written, which would:

(i) serve as the basis of how teachers are trained to understand how the English language works;

(ii) inform professional discussion of all aspects of English teaching;

the principles which should guide teachers on how far and in what ways the model should be made explicit to pupils, to make them conscious of how language is used in a range of contexts;

what, in general terms, pupils need to know about how the English language works, and in consequence what they should have been taught, and be expected to understand, on this score at age 7, 11 and 16.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the capital allocation for 1987-88 of all the local education authorities which received more than Bradford metropolitan district council.

Mr. Dunn: The allocations for education prescribed capital expenditure which were larger than that made to Bradford metropolitan district council were:

Local education authority	*Allocation £'000*
Inner London Education Authority	14,957
Essex	11,600
Hampshire	10,918
Humberside	10,753
Derbyside	9,036
Manchester	8,968
Staffordshire	7,591
Kent	7,514
Gloucestershire	7,167
Suffolk	6,683

TRANSPORT

Chinook Helicopter Accident

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the accidents investigation branch report on the accident to the Chinook helicopter BV 234LR G-BISO 2 May 1984 to be published.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The accidents investigation branch report on this accident is going through the legal processes required before publication. It is expected that this report will be published during the summer of this year.

Concrete Roads (Noise Levels)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to reduce noise levels emanating from newly constructed major roads with concrete surfaces.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is the Department's policy to take noise protection measures where traffic on newly constructed roads, whether concrete or bituminous, causes noise to rise above specified levels. Local highway authorities act similarly. Studies by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory show that concrete and bituminous road surfaces result in similar noise levels when textured to provide similar skidding resistance.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Moore: The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee is the only such body for which I am responsible. I am required, as far as is reasonably practicable, to secure that at least half of the membership of the committee consists of persons who are disabled. Currently there are 20 members, of whom 11 are disabled. I do not think it appropriate to identify the members with disabilities.

The members of the Committee are:
Sir Peter Baldwin *(Chairman)*.
Peter Large Joint Committee on Mobility for the Disabled.
Joe Hennessy Disabled Drivers' Association.
Adrian Stokes Disabled Drivers Motor Club.
Bert Massie Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation.
Trevor Meadows National Advisory Unit for Community Transport.
Sally Greengross Age Concern.
James Ross MENCAP.
James Elder-Woodward Strathclyde Regional Council.
Clive Davis Royal National Institute for the Deaf.
Jill Allen National Federation of the Blind.
Bob Ley South Wales Transport (retired).
Bill Buchanan British Railways Board.
Claudia Flanders Transport and Disability Consultant.
Robert Taylor Birmingham Airport Ltd.
Leslie Stephenson Townsend Thoresen.
Cliff Twort Transport and General Workers Union.
John Dobinson Access Committee for England.
John Hannam MP All Party Disablement Group.
Allan Beard Access to the Skies Committee.
Keith Brown London Regional Transport.

Manchester Airport (Accident)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the chief inspector of accidents has now submitted his report on the accident to the Boeing 737 at Manchester airport on 22 August 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The report of the investigation into the accident to Boeing 737 G-BGJL which occurred at Manchester airport on 22 August 1985 is now being completed by the inspector prior to the commencement of the legal processes, including consideration of representations by persons whose reputations might be adversely affected. Publication will take place as soon as possible, but is unlikely to be before late summer.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Trafficking

117. **Mr. Dickens** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating drug trafficking.

118. **Dr. Blackburn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating drug trafficking.

119. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating drug trafficking.

120. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating drug trafficking.

Mr. Hurd: On 20 October I chaired a meeting of Community Ministers in London at which it was agreed that the Community and its member states have a major role to play in stepping up the fight against drug abuse.

Agreement was reached upon a seven-point plan which would be pursued in conjunction with the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group, covering:

(i) Measures to reduce demand for drugs especially among young people;

(ii) Measures to improve the treatment of addicts and rehabilitation services;

(iii) ensuring that bilateral and Community aid supports as appropriate a recipient country's efforts to combat drug abuse;

(iv) steps to ensure that legislation takes account of the need to maintain effective control over illicit drug trafficking, particularly at the Community's external frontiers;

(v) mutual enforcement of confiscation orders relating to drug traffickers' assets;

(vi) enhanced co-operation between law enforcement agencies involving exchange of drug liaison officers between member states, the posting of drug liaison officers to other countries and the establishment of a worldwide directory of those involved in the fight against drug abuse; this would be achieved by inviting the Trevi Working Group Three to examine the scope for creating a co-ordinated network of drug liaison officers to monitor developments in producer countries;

(vii) preparation of joint assessments by Community ambassadors in drug-producing countries in order to ensure a steady flow of recommendations for action by the Twelve.

At the European Council, in December, Heads of State and Government endorsed this plan, action on which will be carried forward in ad hoc meetings of officials under the Belgian presidency. A copy of the Council's conclusions has been placed in the Library.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand are currently being held in police cells.

Mr. Mellor: On 16 January 1987 there were 197 persons held in police cells in England and Wales, most of whom are likely to have been untried.

Airey Neave (Murder)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, the case being concluded, he will now answer the question of the right hon. Member for South Down, *Official Report*, column 532, 6 November 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that, as part of an operation which led to the conviction of two men for conspiracy to murder, two detectives represented themselves as members of a terrorist organisation. I am informed that the police made an apology in court for any distress caused to the family of the late Mr. Airey Neave.

Immigration

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current monthly rate of representations by hon. Members in immigration cases; and how it compares with the rate prior to the introduction of his March 1986 guidelines.

Mr. Waddington: The following table gives the number of immigration files created each month since October 1985 as a result of representations made on immigration matters by right hon. and hon. Members.

	Numbers
1985	
October	1,782
November	1,552
December	1,044
1986	
January	1,403
February	1,434
March	1,355
April	1,318
May	1,202
June	1,728
July	1,279
August	1,255
September	1,745
October	1,822
November	1,568
December	1,402

Notes:

1. These figures include a number of letters dealing with general issues rather than individual cases.
2. Representations made on behalf of a single family may be counted as more than one case where the immigration circumstances of more than one member of the family are under consideration.
3. Further representations made after reply has been sent are included separately in these figures.
4. Representations received about the same case from more than one right hon. Member or hon. Member are counted separately.
5. These figures include representations on after entry cases as well as those arising from port refusals where stops on removal were followed by written representations.
6. The figures relate to the months in which the representations were received. Those for November and December 1986 include substantial numbers of representations on behalf of passengers who were granted temporary admission in October and who were subsequently refused leave to enter after they had been further interviewed by immigration officers.
7. The guidelines to which my hon. and learned Friend refers were introduced on 1 May 1986.

Official Information

Mr. Michael Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a complete list of statutory provisions bearing upon the disclosure of official information, other than the Official Secrets Acts, in order to update the list of provisions published in appendix V of the Franks report.

Mr. Waddington [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *656*]: The following is the information requested:

Census Act 1920, section 8(2).
Public Health Act 1936, section 287.
Coal Act 1938, section 1(3).
Population (Statistics) Act 1938, section 4(2).
Ministry of Supply Act 1939, section 17.
London Building Acts (Amendment) Act 1939, section 142.
Agricultural Returns Act (NI) 1939, section 1(5).
War Damage Act 1943, section 118.
Water Act 1945, schedule 3, paragraph 82(5).
Atomic Energy Act 1946, section 13.
Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946, section 56.
Building Restrictions (War-time Contraventions) Act 1946, section 5 (now defunct).
Agriculture Act 1947, section 81.
Cotton (Centralised Buying) Act 1947, section 23(2).
Industrial Organisation and Development Act 1947, section 5.
Statistics of Trade Act 1947, section 9.
Civil Defence Act 1948, section 4(4).
Cotton Spinning (Re-equipment Subsidy) Act 1948, section 4.
Monopolies & Restrictive Practices (Enquiry & Control) Act 1948, section 17.
Radioactive Substances Act 1948, section 7.

Wireless Telegraph Act 1949, sections 5, (6)(ii) and 15(4)(c).
London County Council (General Powers) Act 1949, section 35.
Coast Protection Act 1949, section 25.
Statistics of Trade Act (NI) 1949, section 8.
Slaughterhouses Act (NI) 1953, section 6(5).
Clean Air Act 1956, section 26.
Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1956, section 33.
Agriculture Act 1957, section 26.
Cinematograph Films Act 1957, section 5.
London County Council (General Powers) Act 1957, section 58.
Marketing of Eggs Act (NI) 1957, section 20.
Agricultural Marketing Act 1958, section 47.
Public Records Act 1958, schedule 2.
Food and Drugs Act (NI) 1958, section 41(6).
Building (Scotland) Act 1959, section 18(8).
Horticulture Act 1960, section 12(3).
Radioactive Substances Act 1960, section 13(3).
Covent Garden Market Act 1961, section 32.
Factories Act 1961, section 154.
Public Health Act 1961, section 68.
Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act 1961, section 12.
Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961, section 10.
Agricultural Produce (Meat Regulation and Pig Industry) Act (NI) 1962, section 15(5).
Offices, Shops & Railway Premises Act 1963, section 59.
Water Resources Act 1963, section 112.
Weights & Measures Act 1963, section 48.
Agriculture and Horticulture Act 1964, section 13.
Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963, section 28.
Harbours Act 1964, section 46.
Marketing of Potatoes Act Act (NI) 1964, section 13.
Agricultural Marketing Act (NI) 1964, section 23.
Cereals Marketing Act 1965, section 17.
Gas Act 1965, schedule 6, paragraph 9.
Highlands and Islands Development (Scotland) Act 1965, section 12.
Factories Act (NI) 1965, section 154.
Land Development Values (Compensation) Act (NI) 1965, section 40.
Office and Shop Premises Act (NI) 1966, section 56.
Horticulture Act (NI) 1966, section 29.
Abortion Act 1967, section 2(1).
Agriculture Act 1967, sections 24 and 25.
Iron and Steel Act 1967, section 43.
Adoption Act (NI) 1967, section 44.
Medicines Act 1968, section 118(2).
Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968, section 50.
Trade Descriptions Act 1968, section 28.
Post Office Act 1969, section 65.
Finance Act 1969, section 58(6).
Census Act (NI) 1969, sections 6, 7(4) and 7(5).
Agriculture Act 1970, sections 21, 83 and 108.
Sea Fish Industry Act 1970, section 14(2).
Fire Precautions Act 1971, section 21.
National Savings Bank Act 1971, section 12.
Town and County Planning Act 1971, section 281(3).
Local Government Act 1972, sections 100 and 158 and schedule 12A parts I and II.
European Communities Act 1972, sections 11(2) and 12.
Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972, section 263.
Water Act (NI) 1972, section 24(8).
Water Act 1973, section 32(7) and schedule 3, part III, paragraph 41.
Fair Trading Act 1973, sections 30(3) and 133.
Employment Agencies Act 1973, section 9(4).
Employmet and Trading Act 1973, section 4(5).
Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, sections 27(4) and 28.
Local Government Act 1974, sections 29, 32 and 33.
Prices Act 1974, schedule, paragraph 12.
Consumer Credit Act 1974, sections 160(4) and 174(5).
Legal Aid Act 1974, section 22.
Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, section 9.
Control of Pollution Act 1974, section 94.
Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, section 28.
Supply Powers Act 1975, section 5.
Biological Standards Act 1975, section 5.
Sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 61.
Scottish Devlopment Act 1975, section 10(7).
Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976, section 41.
Energy Act 1976, schedule 2, paragraph 7.
Race Relations Act 1976, section 52.
Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976, section 30(4).
Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976, schedule 4, paragraph 11 and schedule 5, paragraph 12.
Banking Act 1979, section 19.
Estate Agents Act 1979, section 10.
Agricultural Statistics Act 1979, sections 3 and 4.
Merchant Shipping Act 1979, section 40(1)(b).
Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, section 167, and schedule 20, part III.
Competition Act 1980, section 19.
Water (Scotland) Act 1980, section 38(6).
Highways Act 1980, section 292(4).
Deep Sea Mining (Temporary Provisions) Act 1981, section 13.
Film Levy Finance Act 1981, section 8.
Energy Conservation Act 1981, section 20(8).
Fisheries Act 1981, section 12.
Education Act 1981, schedule 1, paragraph 4.
British Telecommunications Act 1981, section 50.
Local Government Finance Act 1982, section 30.
Iron & Steel Act 1982, section 33.
Insurance Companies Act 1982, section 47a.
Industrial Training Act 1982, section 6(2).
Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) Act 1982, section 10(2).
Civil Aviation Act 1982, section 23.
Value Added Tax Act 1983, section 44.
Diseases of Fish Act 1983, section 9.
Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984, section 62(3).
Building Act 1984, section 96.
Telecommunications Act 1984, section 101.
Data Protection Act 1984, sections 15, 19, 20 and schedule 1, paragraph 3.
Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, section 98.
Anatomy Act 1984, section 10(6).
Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, section 43.
Companies Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985, section 2.
Companies Act 1985, sections 449.
Weights and Measures Act 1985, sections 64 and 79(7).
Building Societies Act 1986, section 53.
Consumer Safety (Amendment) Act 1986, section 11.
Financial Services Act 1986, part VIII.
Animals Scientific Procedures Act 1986, section 24.
Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986, section 34.
Gas Act 1986, section 42.
Airports Act 1986, section 74.

EMPLOYMENT

EC (Job Growth)

121. **Mr. Charles Wardle** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of jobs throughout the European Community.

124. **Sir Bernard Braine** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of jobs throughout the European Community.

125. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of jobs throughout the European Community.

Mr. Lee: The progress made was considerable. In particular, at the Labour and Social Affairs Council on 11

December the Council adopted an action programme for employment growth, based on a text put forward by the United Kingdom, Italy and the republic of Ireland. The action programme sets the four priorities for the Labour and Social Affairs Council's future work as being the promotion of new business and employment growth; more efficient labour markets; better training for young people and adults; and more help for long term unemployed people.

First proposals under the programme are to be brought forward before the Council's next meeting. The European Commission will in addition be making six-monthly reports to the Council and the European Parliament on progress made in the programme's implementation. For a more detailed account of the action programme I refer my hon. Friends to my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 15 December 1986, at column 368.

In addition to the adoption of the action programme, achievements during the United Kingdom presidency in a number of other areas will also contribute substantially to the growth of jobs throughout the Community. Particular examples are the substantial progress made towards the completion of the internal market and towards lightening the burdens on business arising from Community obligations.

Small Businesses

122. **Mr. Lord** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of smaller businesses throughout the European Community.

123. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of smaller businesses throughout the European Community.

124. **Mr. Hind** asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging the growth of smaller businesses throughout the European Community.

Mr. Lee: The European Community approved the broad principles of an action programme for small and medium-sized enterprises at the Industry Council on 20 October 1986. They adopted a resolution recognising the important role of SMEs in job creation and calling for a Community strategy for SMEs to complement national action. The programme's two main aims are to create a favourable environment for SMEs and to develop specific measures to improve their effectiveness, efficiency and access to finance. The programme provides a framework for the activities of the Commission's SME task force. It identifies the areas in which they will develop proposals in more detail including the reduction of burdens on businesses; ensuring that European Community policies relating to taxation, company law, competition, and the internal market are developed with due regard to the needs and interests of SMEs; ensuring that SMEs have access to European Community assistance through, for example, the European social fund and research and development programmes; setting up information centres to improve SMEs' understanding and awareness of European Community programmes and policies; and improving SMEs' access to advice, training and finance.

In a separate set of conclusions the Industry Council of 20 October emphasised the priority that it attaches to reducing fiscal, administrative and legal constraints on business, particularly SMEs, so as to encourage enterprise and promote employment.

On 17 November 1986 the Economic and Finance Council reached agreement on the substance of a new lending facility for SMEs. One and a half billion ecu (about £1·1 billion) will be made available in two equal tranches, the first to be raised by the Commission, the second by the European Investment Bank.

The Council has already begun discussion of a Commission proposal for a Council directive on the application of value added tax to SMEs. The proposals include provisions concerning the exemption limits below which small businesses are not required to be registered for VAT, and a simplified scheme to be made available for all businesses whose annual turnover does not exceed 150,000 ECU (about £110,000).

In addition, the Labour and Social Affairs Council on 11 December adopted and action programme on employment growth which sets out the formation of new businesses and employment growth as one of the priority areas of its future work. The programme calls for the rapid implementation of the SME action programme as endorsed by the Industry Council and for support for the efforts being made within member states to encourage the setting up and expansion of SMEs and one-man businesses in particular through the removal of unnecessary administrative constraints and a review of existing Community legislation to remove obstacles to the number of people taking up self-employment.

Community Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General how much the community programme will cost in the current year *(a)* gross and *(b)* net.

Mr. Lee: The current cash limit for the community programme is £1,061·8 million. This is £5 million lower than the initial cash limit, reflecting a take-up of the scheme which has been slightly lower than expected.

The net cost of the programme is about £440 million, some 40 per cent. of gross costs.

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General what efforts are made, and to what extent it is a specific part of the objects of the community programme, to place participants in a job at the end of their 12 months.

Mr. Lee: A principal aim of the community programme is to help unemployed people secure permanent employment. Many sponsors provide training in job search skills and participants are granted time off with pay to visit their local jobcentre and attend interviews with local employers.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement about proposed reductions in community programme plans in 1987-88; and if he will provide a breakdown of the reductions as between the voluntary sector and the private sector for each of the Manpower Services Commission areas.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General when he expects the Aigburth and Lark Lane community care project, details of which have been sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, to be approved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Proposals for projects under the community programme are considered by the appropriate local office of the Manpower Services Commission with the advice of the area manpower board. I understand that, in this case, a formal proposal has not yet been put forward by the Aigburth and Lark Lane community care project to the local office of the Manpower Services Commission. The details sent by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside are insufficient for the Commission to reach a decision.

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the working of the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Yes, I am very satisfied with the operation of the community programme, which is providing worthwhile work experience for 300,000 unemployed people each year on projects which bring benefit to the community. Survey evidence shows that around a third of those who take part go straight from the programme into employment or training and about half will have had at least one job or training within 12 months of leaving.

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* the Manpower Services Commission community programmes in the city of Liverpool at the latest date; and how many are employed on each project.

Mr. Lee: A table listing the number of community programme agencies and independent sponsored projects administered by the Manpower Services Commission's Merseyside inner community programme area office, and the number employed on each is as follows. The information was collated on 16 January 1987.

Agency	*Number Employed*
Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service	342
Community Task Force	353
Liverpool RC Archdiocese	226
NACRO	306
Liverpool Diocesan Care and Repair Association	233
Diggers	111
Toxteth Activities Group	93
Spina Bifida Community Service	61
Speke Enterprises Ltd.	108
Liverpool & Youth Workers Consortium	76
Merseyside Improvements Ltd.	727
Fazakerley & District	156
Liverpool Health Authority	98
North West Community Services Ltd.	249
Ners	77
Landlife	57
South Sefton Health Authority	140
Christ Church Council	56
Merseyside Youth Association	446
AT4	339
Aintree Parish Church	60
Services for People in Need	201
G Force	635
Total	5,150
Independent sponsors	
Agricultural Training Ltd.	50
British Deaf Association	7
Greenbank Project	42
North City Cab	45
Priority Management Group	33
Dankfield House	47
Merseyside Everyman Theatre Ltd.	18
Society of Biophysical Medicine	19
Dovecot Residents Community Scheme	45
Mersey Heritage	38
Mountain Venture Outdoor Education Prog	23
Liverpool Personal Services Society	5
Merseyside Probation Service (Speke)	7
Pre-School Education Resource Centre	18
L'Arche	17
Liverpool Childrens Holiday Organisation	5
Merseyside Chamber of Commerce	6
Boys' Brigade	4
L'pool Voluntary Society for the Blind	8
Rice Lane Community Association	67
West Everton Age Concern	80
Charles Wootton Centre	24
Anfield Foundation	12
Aware Merseyside Trust	6
Bangladeshi Family Welfare	13
Liverpool YMCA—'Y' Sport	34
Merseyside Energy Advice Unit	12
North Everton Laundry	38
Total	723
Grand Total	5,873

Centres for the Unemployed

Mr. Pike asked the Paymaster General what is his Department's policy with regard to the extension of existing centres for the unemployed.

Mr. Lee: The Manpower Services Commission funds a number of posts in centres for the unemployed through the community programme. There are no plans to increase the support for these centres.

Availability for Work Scheme

Mr. Park asked the Paymaster General (1) what has been the number of people interviewed by his officials in Coventry as part of the project to see which people are available for work;

(2) what is the number of people over the age of 50 years who have been interviewed by his officials in Coventry as part of the availability for work scheme;

(3) what is the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female disabled people who have been interviewed by his officials in Coventry as part of the availability for work scheme;

(4) how many people living in Coventry have been refused benefit after being interviewed by his officials under his availability for work test.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As I announced on 28 October, we are introducing improved procedures to establish the long-standing requirement that benefit should only be paid to unemployed claimants who are available for work in accordance with long-standing legal rules. These better procedures were introduced in the Coventry unemployment benefit offices on 10 November 1986.

At 26 December 1986, the latest date for which information is available, 3,957 new claimants in Coventry had completed the availability questionnaire. Of these, six

people have had their claims disallowed by the independent adjudicating authorities because they are not available for work and a further 53 cases are still under consideration. Our records do not separately distinguish sex, age, whether a claimant is disabled or whether it has been necessary to interview a claimant.

Disabled People

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Paymaster General if, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1986, *Official Report*, column *213*, schemes providing vocational training for disabled people, combined with a substantial degree of adaptation of workplaces, are now eligible for support from the European social fund if they are in priority areas of the country.

Mr. Lee: The European Commission's guidelines for applications to the European social fund in 1987 removed the specific priority allocated to vocational training for disabled people combined with a substantial degree of adaption of workplaces. However, priority was retained for operations in priority areas for disabled people capable of working in the open labour market. As a result any schemes in priority areas which would have been eligible under the 1986 guidelines should still qualify under the 1987 guidelines. However, the final interpretation of the guidelines rests with the European Commission.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Paymaster General if support from the European social fund is available for vocational training of disabled people only if schemes are in priority areas.

Mr. Lee: The specific social fund guideline which accords priority to operations for disabled people capable of working in the open labour market is restricted to priority regions. However, the final interpretation of this guideline rests with the European Commission which has in the past been prepared to support under it some operations for disabled people taking place outside the priority regions so long as those taking part are residents of priority regions. In addition, disabled people may also be eligible to benefit from other employment and training programmes supported by the social fund under other of the fund's guidelines not specifically directed towards helping the disabled.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Paymaster General if he has any intention to seek to amend the restrictions on eligibility of projects for disabled people under European social fund guidelines.

Mr. Lee: Yes. The next opportunity will be at a meeting of the European Social Fund Advisory Committee, due to take place next month at which representatives of my Department will put forward the case for extending the availability of support for disabled people under the guidelines of the European social fund. Final decisions on the guidelines rest with the European Commission.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if he will list the number of job losses in the United Kingdom tobacco industry by regions since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The precise information requested is not available. However, estimates related to the tobacco industry in Great Britain showed a net loss of 15,000 employees in employment between September 1979 and September 1986, the latest date for which figures are available.

The available regional employment estimates for the industry are from censuses of employment taken in September 1981 and September 1984. Between these dates, there was a net loss of 2,200 employees employed in the tobacco industry in the south-east region and no reduction in the northern region. Figures for other regions cannot be given without disclosing confidential information about individual concerns; the 1984 census estimates for Northern Ireland are not yet available. The reduction between the two census dates in the total number employed in the industry in Great Britain was 6,800.

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General how many persons were employed in the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom at the latest date; and what were the figures in 1979.

Mr. Lee: The estimated number of employees in employment in the tobacco industry in Great Britain are as follows:

Date	*Employees in Employment (thousands)*
June 1979	31·0
June 1986	17·3
September 1986	16·5

These estimates are subject to considerable potential estimation error due to the relatively small number of employees in the industry. Comparison between the figures for June and September could be affected by seasonal factors. Estimates are not available for Northern Ireland.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid (Legal Systems)

100. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of his Department toward aid projects in Commonwealth countries funded by third countries which have as their goal the overhaul of the legal system.

Mr. Chris Patten: Independent Commonwealth countries exercise their sovereign rights in overhauling their legal systems and can seek advice and assistance from whatever source they deem appropriate. We are ready to consider any request to provide advice or assistance on legal matters.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency

101. **Mr. White** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the direct British contribution has yet been paid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency; what information he has on the payment of contributions by Arab states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The 1986 contribution of £5 million has been paid. A further £5 million has been pledged for 1987 and will be paid during the course of the year.

For information on the payment of contributions by Arab states, I refer the hon. Member to annex I of the

addendum to the report of the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency of October 1986, UN Official Record No. A/41/13/Add1, copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Television Licences

Mr. Kaufman asked the Prime Minister how many television sets there are in 10 Downing street; where they are located; and who pays the licence fee for each of them.

The Prime Minister: Thirteen television sets are currently in use at 10 Downing street. No licence fees are payable for television sets on Crown property used for Government purposes.

ENERGY

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what records are being made of any accidents, incidents or untoward occurrences involving a flask containing spent nuclear fuel where the events did not meet the criteria for an incident notifiable to Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what emergency plans have been approved by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate in respect of accidents involving flasks containing spent nuclear fuel; whether separate emergency plans, or sections of plans, have been approved in respect of flasks containing damaged, distorted or failed nuclear fuel elements; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what are the reporting criteria for an incident notifiable to Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate in relation to an accident, incident, or untoward occurrence involving a flask containing spent nuclear fuel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The emergency plans approved by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive for all licensed nuclear installations include provision for dealing with any flask incident on site, as do the plans of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Accidents, incidents and untoward occurrences, including any involving flasks, at a licensed nuclear installation are required to be recorded in a formal register, available at all times for inspection by HMNII. If any such event causes significant radiological exposure, or shows that the safe operation or condition of the plant may be affected, the licence terms require that the Health and Safety Executive be formally notified as soon as practicable. The UKAEA also has arrangements for providing full information on any such event to HMNII.

The Secretary of State for Transport is responsible for regulations governing flasks in transit outside nuclear sites.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will now make available for independent assessment all the details of the incident at Windscale involving radioactive contamination of a worker on 27 March 1981, and all the documents relating to subsequent inquiries;

(2) if he will now make available for independent assessment all the details of the incident at Sellafield involving radioactive contamination on 18 June 1981, and all the documents relating to subsequent inquiries;

(3) if he will now make available for independent assessment all the details of the radiation contamination incident at Sellafield reported to the nuclear installation inspectorate on 13 November 1984.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the answer already given to him on 8 December 1986 at columns *5-6*.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Peter Walker: There are no such statutory requirements relating to the public bodies for which I am responsible. British Coal, the area electricity boards, BNFL and the UKAEA ll included references in their latest annual reports indicating their willingness to employ disabled people.

Generating Plant

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions have taken place in recent years between his Department and the Central Electricity Generating Board on *(a)* the criteria determining a merit order of operation of generating plant, *(b)* management policies with consequences for the merit order of operation of generating plant and *(c)* accounting and investment policies with consequences for the merit order of operation of generating plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department has regular discussions with the Electricity Council about the general financial framework for the electricity supply industry, and with the Central Electricity Generating Board about the board's capital development programme. Subject to these, the management and operation of the generating system, including the determination of the merit order, are matters for the CEGB.

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Energy what account is taken of the likely merit order of operation of generating plant, and of possible changes in that merit order during plant lifetime, in considering investment approval for a new power station; what information on such matters is provided to his Department by the Central Electricity Generating Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Central Electricity Generating Board now informs my Department of the net effective cost of a proposed new power station. The calculation of the NEC takes into account the expected position in the merit order of the new station throughout its expected operating life.

Coal-fired Power Stations

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a list of coal-fired power stations of gross

capability 100 MW or more showing for each station *(a)* the date investment approval was given, *(b)* the net effective cost per kilowatt per year as calculated at the time investment approval was given, *(c)* what availability factor or load factor was used in the net effective cost calculation at that time, *(d)* the load factor achieved in the last year and *(e)* the present position in the Central Electricity Generating Board merit order of operation.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall ask the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board to write to the hon. Member.

Bioethanol

Mr. Knowles asked the Secretary of State for Energy what research has been carried out into the feasibility, cost-effectiveness and environmental implications of using bioethanol as a substitute for lead in petrol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Studies have been carried out and several international seminars held, on the use of bioethanol as substitute for lead as an octane booster in petrol. All have concluded that there are cheaper alternatives. However, the energy technology support unit at Harwell is carrying out a detailed study on the cost of production of ethanol from various biomass sources. Its report is expected to be published towards the end of this year.

Nuclear Accidents (Convention)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government have signed the International Atomic Energy Authority's convention on assistance in the case of a nuclear accident or nuclear emergency adopted on 26 September 1986; when her Majesty's Government expect to ratify it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 January 1987.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Aylesbury Crown Court

Mr. Baldry asked the Attorney-General what is the average time taken by Aylesbury Crown court to pay counsel's fees; and what is the present number of fee notes outstanding there.

The Attorney-General: In standard fee cases about one week. In other cases on average between four to six weeks. The number of fee notes outstanding is about 116.

Legal Aid

Mr. Lawrence asked the Attorney-General if he will list the extensions made to the availability of legal aid since May 1979.

The Attorney-General: The extensions to the availability of publicly funded legal services under the legal aid scheme since May 1979 are as follows:

1 December 1982: Assistance by way of representation (ABWOR) extended to provide legally aided representation before mental health review tribunals;

1 May 1983: ABWOR extended to cover representation for parents in child care proceedings;

24 May 1983: Legal aid extended to applications for bail to the Crown court where bail has been refused by the magistrates' court;

3 October 1983: Introduction of the statutory scheme to provide access to legal advice at magistrates' courts (the "magistrates' court duty solicitor scheme");

1 April 1984: ABWOR extended to prison disciplinary hearings;

27 May 1984: Legal aid extended to cover representation for parents in child care proceedings; (The extension of ABWOR announced on 1 May 1983 thus became redundant);

1 January 1986: ABWOR extended to hearings requesting warrants of further detention under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act;

1 January 1986: Introduction of the statutory scheme to provide access to legal advice for those detained by the police (the "24-hour duty solicitor scheme").

The Lord Chancellor also announced on 17 February 1986 that the following extensions to the legal aid schemes would be made as resources permit:

(a) an extension of the legal advice and assistance scheme to allow solicitors, in some circumstances, to visit the housebound to provide legal advice;

(b) an extension of ABWOR to cover proceedings under section 47 of the National Assistance Act 1948;

(c) an extension of ABWOR to cover applications under section 28(6) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969.

In addition, since May 1979, the financial limits governing eligibility for legal aid have been raised on six occasions.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many letters have been received by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the No. 9 legal aid north-eastern area from *(a)* the Law Society on local law societies, *(b)* individual firms of solicitors or *(c)* members of the general public alleging delays in the processing of legal aid cases in the No. 9 north-eastern region.

The Attorney-General: So far as can be ascertained, the Lord Chancellor's Department has received no letters relating specifically to delays in processing legal aid applications in No. 9 area office. The Law Society's legal aid head office is aware of one complaint from a firm of solicitors. No. 9 area itself receives a number of inquiries about the progress of individual applications, some of which could be classed as complaints about delays, but no detailed records are kept. The area director regularly informs local law societies of the current position regarding the workload of the office.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General what is the average time it takes to process legal aid applications in the No. 9 north-eastern area.

The Attorney-General: The latest figures available are published in appendix 2G of the 36th legal aid annual reports. These show that, for legal aid area No. 9, it took an average 77·24 days (actual, not working) from receipt of a legal aid application to the issue of a certificate during financial year 1985-86.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General why officers in the No. 9 legal aid north-eastern region have been instructed not to receive telephone calls from solicitors concerning individual applications for legal aid.

The Attorney-General: This is a matter for the legal aid administration of the Law Society which is responsible for the operation of the civil legal aid scheme.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General what estimate he has made of the effects on the conduct of cases and the time at which solicitors are instructed of the delays in granting legal aid applications in the No. 9 north-eastern area.

The Attorney-General: The length of time taken to process legal aid applications in No. 9 legal aid area is below the national average. In cases of genuine urgency, where an immediate decision is necessary, emergency legal aid can be granted.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many executive officers are currently employed at the legal aid No. 9 north-eastern area; what is the nominal establishment; and whether the Lord Chancellor has any plans to increase the number of executive officers to overcome the current backlog of work in the area.

The Attorney-General: Staffing levels in the individual area offices are the responsibility of the legal aid administration of the Law Society. I understand that two senior executive officers and two executive officers are currently employed at the No. 9 legal aid area office. There is no formal establishment figure, but four vacancies have occurred recently. Subject to the completion of internal training programmes, it is expected that these will be filled later this year.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General whether he will itemise the main heads of work in the legal aid No. 9 north-eastern area, indicating those heads where the work load has increased and those where it has reduced for each year over the past three years to the end of 1986.

The Attorney-General: The main areas of work dealt with in all legal aid area offices are:

Civil legal aid applications
Applications for assistance by way of representation (ABWOR)
Applications for extensions of the advice and assistance (green form) initial cost limit
Assessment and payment of civil legal aid bills
Assessment and payment of magistrates' court criminal legal aid bills
Assessment and payment of ABWOR bills
Assessment and payment of green form bills
Assessment and payment of duty solicitor bills

Figures showing the volume of work in each of these categories by individual area offices are not available.

However, on a national basis the volume of work in each of these categories has altered over the past three years as follows:

	1982-83	*1985-86*
Civil applications	283,806	366,269
Green form extensions	147,434	239,960
ABWOR applications	80,786	82,993
Civil legal aid bills	148,077	182,463
Magistrates court criminal bills	322,813	371,452
ABWOR bills	60,743	60,667
Green form bills	733,410	1,038,805

No comparison is possible for duty solicitor bills since the duty solicitor schemes were introduced after 1982-83.

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General (1) why overtime has been banned at the No. 9 north-eastern legal aid offices;

(2) why no temporary officers, clerical or other grades, have been employed at the offices of the No. 9 north-eastern legal aid area in order to reduce the backlog of work.

The Attorney-General: This is a matter for the legal aid administration of the Law Society.

Recorders

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Attorney-General whether the figures given by him in his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy on 16 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *431*, refer to both recorders and assistant recorders or only to recorders.

The Attorney-General: To recorders only. The statutory provisions have no application to assistant recorders.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Attorney-General in how many cases since May 1979 the Lord Chancellor has not renewed the appointments of recorders of the Crown court who were citizens of the Republic of Ireland.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not available. The Act of Settlement requires that a recorder should be a British subject. No inquiries are made as to the possibility of dual nationality.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Attorney-General in how many of the 27 cases referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy on 16 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *431*, the Lord Chancellor declined to extend the particular recorder's appointments because he was not satisfied.

The Attorney-General: According to the information available, in at least seven cases.

SCOTLAND

Medical Statistics (Black Inquiry)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will update the medical statistics in his Department's submission to the inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir Douglas Black as published in *The Lancet* on 26 May 1984 to include the figures for 1982-84 and with special reference to the statistics for postal districts in the south-west of Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: Additions to the tables submitted to Sir Douglas Black's inquiry by the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service are at tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Registrations (and average annual registration rates per 100,000) of leukaemia in the 0-24 age group in selected areas of Scotland 1982-84.

Area	*Diagnosis*			
	Lymphoid	*Myeloid*	*Other*	*All Leukaemia*
West Coast	15 (2·1)	6 (0·9)	3 (0·4)	24 (3·4)
West Inland [1]	14 (1·8)	5 (0·7)	1 (0·1)	20 (2·6)
Rest of Scotland	88 (1·7)	32 (0·6)	3 (0·1)	123 (2·4)
All Scotland	103 (1·8)	38 (0·7)	6 (0·1)	147 (2·6)

[1] Data included in Rest of Scotland.

Table 2: Observed (O) and Expected (E) registrations of leukaemia in the 0-24 age group population resident within the ten miles radius of Hunterston 1982-84

Diagnosis	*O*	*E*	*P*
Myeloid	2	0·82	ns
Lymphoid	1	2·21	ns
All Leukaemia	3	3·16	ns

ns = non-significant.

The data for registrations of leukaemia in the 0-24 age group population resident in the west coast of Scotland in the period 1982-84 are presented in table 3. The areas described as the south-west coast, Ayrshire coast and Clyde estuary are those used in the submission of the Common Services Agency of the Scottish Health Service to the inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir Douglas Black.

Table 3: Observed (O) and Expected (E) registrations of leukaemia in the 0-24 age group in selected areas of the west coast of Scotland 1982-84.

Area	Diagnosis							
	Lymphoid		Myeloid		Other		All Leukaemia	
	O	E	O	E	O	E	O	E
South West Coast	5	2·21	1	0·81	1	0·13	7[1]	3·15
Ayrshire Coast	4	3·81	4	1·41	0	0·22	8	5·44
Clyde Estuary	5	3·61	1	1·33	1	0·21	7	5·15
Remainder of West Coast	1	2·91	0	1·07	1	0·17	2	4·16

[1] $p < 0.05$

AIDS

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice has been issued to prisoners about the implications for the spread of AIDS through the shared use of wet razors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There should be no occasion for the shared use of razors in Scottish penal establishments since each inmate is issued with a disposable or safety razor for his personal use. Guidelines on AIDS issued to prison staff make it clear that razors should not be shared. The AIDS leaflets which are currently being issued to members of the public and which include a warning against sharing razors will shortly be made available to inmates in penal establishments.

Radioactivity Accidents (Police Training)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde as to what training, for each division of the Strathclyde police force, police officers have received to deal with accidents involving radioactivity, as to the exercises each division carries out to deal with such accidents and as to the intervals at which such exercises take place;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde as to what exercises, for each division of Strathclyde police force, police officers have taken part in to prepare themselves for (i) an accident involving radioactive contamination and (ii) evacuation of the population in the event of a worst case nuclear reactor disaster under adverse meteorological conditions, over the last five years.

Mr. Lang: I understand from the chief constable that it is not the policy of Strathclyde police to train personnel on a divisional basis to deal with accidents involving radioactivity. Fully trained police personnel are, however, available at any time to attend and direct force operations in the event of such an accident, and contingency plans prepared by the emergencies planning section of the force are retained within each division.

Similarly, exercises in dealing with this type of accident are not undertaken divisionally, but some divisions have gained experience through participating in exercises organised by agencies other than the police, including the exercises held in each of the past five years by the South of Scotland Electricity Board in relation to the emergency plan for the Hunterston power station. In this context, the police contingency plan for evacuation of the population in the event of a worst case nuclear reactor disaster has been exercised on a simulated basis.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde as to the number, for each division of the Strathclyde police force, of (i) dosimeters, (ii) radiac survey meters, (iii) sets of protective clothing, (iv) breathing units and (v) decontamination units possessed or available for use;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde as to what items of equipment, for each division of Strathclyde police force, are available for police use in an accident involving radioactive contamination.

Mr. Lang: I understand from the chief constable that, although equipment for use in an accident involving radioactive contamination is not held by the force on a divisional basis, 36 dosimeters and 22 radiac survey meters are held centrally for training purposes.

The force does not hold sets of protective clothing, breathing units or decontamination units for this purpose, but the national arrangements for dealing with incidents involving radioactivity (the NAIR scheme) provides for the involvement, where necessary, of other services, including the fire service and hospitals, with access to them.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall reply to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Inverclyde Initiative

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the Inverclyde initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has recently had representations from Inverclyde district council and from the development group of the Inverclyde initiative about the continuing economic problems of the area. These are being considered urgently in consultation with the Scottish Development Agency. My right hon. and learned Friend is to meet a delegation from Inverclyde on 23 January.

Inshore Fisheries Act

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he undertook in pursuance of the Inshore Fisheries Act 1984 prior to laying before the House the Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets (Scotland) Order 1986.

Mr. John MacKay: Consultations were undertaken with a number of salmon and sea fisheries organisations. The Commission of the European Communities was also consulted and confirmed that the order was compatible with Community law and in conformity with the common fisheries policy.

WALES

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Mark Robinson: There are no statutory requirements to appoint or co-opt persons with knowledge of disability in relation to the public bodies to which my right hon. Friend makes appointments.

Health Authorities (Cost Cutting)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether any of the cost cutting exercises by the Welsh health authorities in the last financial year for which figures are available have affected patient attendances.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The in-patient, day cases and out-patient activity of Welsh health authorities for the last two financial years for which figures are available is shown in the table:

	In-patient and day case discharges and deaths			*Total Out-patient attendances*		
	1984-85	*1985-86*	*Percentage increase*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*Percentage increase*
Clwyd	63,064	63,084	0·03	294,137	306,102	4·07
East Dyfed	33,441	34,712	3·80	141,643	153,265	8·21
Pembrokeshire	13,453	14,574	8·33	56,895	67,134	18·00
Gwent	66,761	73,764	10·49	297,030	309,804	4·30
Gwynedd	35,492	38,502	8·48	136,072	144,077	5·88
Mid Glamorgan	81,958	86,780	5·88	386,824	391,818	1·29
Powys	6,931	7,208	4·00	26,445	27,595	4·35
South Glamorgan	88,471	94,829	7·19	510,563	515,522	0·97
West Glamorgan	62,091	64,577	4·00	278,001	288,005	3·60
Wales	451,662	478,030	5·84	2,127,610	2,203,322	3·56

Welsh Language

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Welsh Joint Education Committee about Welsh language education development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Following a series of discussions I have had with representatives of the WJEC in recent months, I am pleased to report that the WJEC has accepted my right hon. Friend's invitation to play a more active part in Welsh language education and has decided to appoint a Welsh Language Education Development Committee for this purpose.

The development committee will have a major role to play in helping to ensure that available resources are effectively used by promoting better co-ordination and sharing of information, and as a source of informed advice to both central and local government on policies and on priorities for future development.

The committee will include representatives from all sectors of the education service, including the University of Wales and the voluntary bodies. Its support costs are being met by the Welsh Office through the WJEC. Our officials are in close touch with WJEC officers on the administrative aspects, so that the committee can be enabled to commence its work without delay.

I greatly welcome the decision of the WJEC to enlarge its role in Welsh language education and I hope that all concerned will support the development committee in its important work.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

USA (Tariff Negotiations)

102. **Mr. Wood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in resolving tariff difficulties with the United States of America.

104. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in resolving tariff difficulties with the United States of America.

107. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in resolving tariff difficulties with the United States of America.

110. **Sir Alex Fletcher** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in resolving tariff difficulties with the United States of America.

Mr. Alan Clark: At the beginning of the United Kingdom presidency there were several trade disputes outstanding between the United States and the Community: more have since arisen through measures taken in the autumn by the last Congress which discriminate against the United State's overseas trade partners. A dispute about the treatment of citrus products

and pasta has been settled satisfactorily to both sides. The Community continues urgently to seek a solution to the major dispute with the United States over the terms of its enlargement. In respect of a number of other disputes the Community proposes to use to the full its rights to seek consultations and if necessary redress in GATT.

EC (Internal Market)

103. **Sir Reginald Eyre** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in completing the internal market.

105. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in completing the internal market.

106. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in completing the internal market.

108. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in completing the internal market.

Mr. Alan Clark: During the United Kingdom presidency (July-December 1986) the Council adopted or agreed 48 individual measures which will help remove barriers to trade in the Community. This represents a substantial acceleration in progress towards completing the internal market and the number of measures adopted is considerably higher than during any previous presidency.

Details of 41 measures were given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East (Mr. Taylor), on 19 December 1986, at columns 765-68. I provided details of the seven remaining measures in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery). 12 January 1987, at column 5.

Japan (Trade Surpluses)

109. **Mr. Warren** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in maintaining pressure on Japan to act to reduce trade surpluses.

111. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in maintaining pressures on Japan to act to reduce trade surpluses.

112. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in maintaining pressures on Japan to act to reduce trade surpluses.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's Presidency of the European Community to maintain pressures on Japan to act to reduce trade surplus.

Mr. Alan Clark: Under the presidency of the United Kingdom the European Community strongly pressed Japan to improve market access through the early implementation of appropriate macro-economic policies and the removal of non-tariff barriers. Discriminatory taxes on imported alcoholic drinks, including Scotch Whisky, became a test case of Japanese intentions, but their concessions announced in December did not go far enough. The Community is therefore continuing to pursue against Japan its GATT case on this particular issue, launched during the United Kingdom presidency. Discussions with the Japanese Government on other current problems continue.

Film Production

Mr. Jack Dormand asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to take any action to stimulate more effective investment in British film production; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Government maintain their view that the provisions of the Films Act 1985 offer a framework within which the commercial film industry can develop and prosper. So far, seven films have been supported under the film production scheme operated by British Screen Finance Ltd. and five projects have received finance under the development scheme managed by the national film development fund. A short films scheme is intended to be in place soon.

National Maritime Institute

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Institution of Professional Civil Servants on employment and pension rights at the National Maritime Institute.

Mr. Butcher: In August 1982 the Minister for Industry and Information Technology met the trade unions side, including representatives of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants, to discuss the terms and conditions of service of civil servants working at the National Maritime Institute. There were also other meetings with officials. As a result it was agreed that NMI Ltd. would offer terms and conditions of employment which, taken as a whole, were not less favourable than those the civil servants then enjoyed.

International Tin Council

Mr. Brinton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what financial contributions have been made by his Department to the International Tin Council since 24 October 1985;

(2) for how long Her Majesty's Government intend to pay their share of the International Tin Council's administrative and legal costs;

(3) what are the proportions spent on legal fees and employment costs of cash contributed by Her Majesty's Government to the International Tin Council since 24 October 1985.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The United Kingdom Government will continue to pay their share of the administrative budget of the International Tin Council so long as it remains a member of the sixth international tin agreement.

The Government's contribution to the administrative account of the council for the year ended 30 June 1986 was £55,701 and is £76,117 for the current year. Details of the budget of the administrative account are confidential, but for obvious reasons the composition of the budget is affected by staff changes following the cessation of buffer stock operations and the legal actions brought against the council.

Torvinstyle Properties Ltd.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what stage has been reached in the inquiries made by Mr. David Gorick of the Department of Trade and Industry, companies division, into Torvinstyle Properties Ltd., trading as Five Star Developments.

Mr. Howard: Torvinstyle Properties Ltd. was placed in creditors voluntary liquidation in August 1986. Inquiries have been concluded and the Department is considering the information obtained.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give further consideration to consultations with Rolls-Royce employees prior to privatisation.

Mr. Pattie: Consultation with the employees of Rolls-Royce remains a matter for the company.

Guinness plc

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the report of his inspectors' investigations into the Guinness company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The inspectors are pressing ahead with their investigation as quickly as possible, but I cannot say when their report will be received.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Butcher: Appointments to the Hearing Aid Council are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend under the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968, which requires that five of the 12 council members shall have either specialised medical knowledge of deafness and audiological technical knowledge or be capable of representing the interests of persons with impaired hearing. The persons presently appointed to these five posts are Dr. S. Bellman, Dr. D. N. Brooks, Mr. R. S. Eldridge, Mrs. M. B. Nobbs and Miss. A. Spokes; two of whom suffer from impaired hearing. Under the terms of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act 1970 my right hon. Friend is required to consider the appointment of persons to represent the needs of the disabled in the transport users consultative committees, domestic coal consumers council, Post Office users councils, gas consumers council and electricity consultative councils. The following members of these bodies are disabled or have knowledge or experience of the disabled:

Mrs. R. Barwick North East England TUCC
Mr. J. Blezard North East England TUCC
Mr. S. Bradshaw London Regional Passengers' Committee
Mr. J. Cartledge London Regional Passengers' Committee
Mr. F. D. Cheese South Eastern ECC
Mr. M. Davey TUCC for Wales
Mr. D. M. Dempsey North East England TUCC
Mr. J. J. Eccles POUC for Northern Ireland
Rev. A. S. Hutchison POUC for Scotland
Mr. D. R. James Midlands ECC
Mrs. P. Lek Merseyside & North Wales EC
Mr. R. A. Morley Yorkshire ECC
Mrs. D. Rhodes TUCC for Southern England
Mrs. R. Sansom East Midlands ECC
Mrs. J. R. M. Searle Yorkshire ECC
Mrs. V. K. Studholme GCC
Mr. M. A. Sullivan Midlands TUCC

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* information available to him on the tobacco factories which have closed in the United Kingdom each year since 1979.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No official statistics are collected on the number of factory closures in the tobacco industry. According to reports in the national press, the following tobacco factories have closed since 1979:

1979—None.
1980—None.
1981 — One cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Rayleigh, Essex).
1982—None.
1983—Two cigarette factories (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Stirling and Glasgow). One cigar factory (Imperial Tobacco, Bristol).
1984 — One cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Basildon).
1985—Two cigarette factories (Gallaher, Middleton and Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Newcastle). One cigar factory (Gallaher, Lisnafillan, Northern Ireland).
1986 — One cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland).

Mergers and Takeover Bids

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all decisions taken by him since 1983 regarding reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission of a proposed takeover of a public company reported on by the Office of Fair Trading giving, in each case, his reasons for those decisions.

Mr. Howard: No. The total number of qualifying mergers (actual and proposed) reported on by the Office of Fair Trading to the Secretary of State from 1983 to 1986 are as follows:

1983: 192
1984: 259
1985: 192
1986: 313

It would be disproportionately costly to provide an itemised list of the 956 cases involved. Of these 956 cases, 31 were referred to the MMC. A list of these references, together with copies of the press notices announcing them, have been placed in the Library of both Houses.

Mr. Evans asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress in his review of existing legislation with regard to mergers and takeover bids.

Mr. Howard: Work on the review is continuing. If changes of policy within the existing law are identified as desirable, the Government will not hesitate to implement them.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government have any plans to seek to change the penalties for insider dealing.

Mr. Channon: Insider dealing is a serious offence which can do great damage to confidence in our financial institutions. We have decided that the maximum penalties should reflect this. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will therefore be bringing forward an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill for consideration in Committee to increase the penalty for insider dealing to a maximum term of seven years imprisonment on conviction on indictment. Our commitment to vigorous enforcement will, if Parliament agrees, be backed up by penalties which fit the crime and provide an effective deterrent.

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce new measures to curb insider dealing.

Mr. Howard: I would refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 10 December 1986, at column 335, and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) today.

Pilkington-BTR (Share Dealings)

Mr. Hind asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the dealings in the shares of Pilkington plc on 14 January in advance of his announcement that the BTR bid would not be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Channon: I understand that the stock exchange has been conducting a preliminary investigation into dealings in the shares of Pilkington on 14 January. Whilst inquiries are not yet complete, it has been established that the buying that day was widespread, chiefly by institutions overseas and in the United Kingdom. Nothing has yet been revealed which would suggest that dealings took place on the basis of leaking information. I understand that the stock exchange investigations are continuing and I expect that full results will be made available to me as soon as practicable.

Civil Servants (Inquiry)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the inquiry which he announced on 18 December which followed allegations that public servants may have misused information; and whether any prosecutions are contemplated.

Mr. Channon: The inspectors have informed me that they have uncovered no evidence implicating any public official other than one junior official at the Office of Fair Trading in any illegal activity. Their inquiries are continuing, but the matter is complex and they do not expect to be able to report definitively for some weeks. The question of prosecution is for the Director of Public Prosecutions. The director is in contact with the inspectors and is keeping the matter under review in the light of the progress of their inquiries.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost to the taxpayer of maintaining a retirement pensioner in a retirement home.

Mr. Viggers: The average cost in the year ended 31 March 1986 of maintaining a pensioner in a home for the elderly run by the health and social services boards was £139 per week. This excludes both capital and central administration costs.

Irish Language

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify what measures he is taking to promote the Irish language.

Mr. Scott: The Government responds to demand for the use of Irish through the education system and through support for the arts. Approximately 20,000 school pupils study Irish. 1,644 took 'O' Level and 269 'A' Level in 1986. Bunscoil Ghaelach, where teaching is wholly in Irish, is recognised as a grant-aided school by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. A special Irish unit has been approved at Steelstown primary school, Londonderry. The Department of Education has a specialist Irish language school inspector. Colleges of further education and universities provide courses in Irish language and literature.

In addition, the Arts Council for Northern Ireland supports traditional cultural activities and Irish language publications of literary merit.

The Government are ready to consider other measures where an appropriate level of demand for the use of the Irish language is established.

Population Figures

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish population figures for Northern Ireland in 1983, broken down in the same way as the Great Britain figures published by the Department of Health and Social Security in table 6 of "Low Income Families 1983."

Mr. Viggers: The information is as follows:

Population total number of families and persons in Northern Ireland, 1983, classified by family type and economic status

	Number of Families	*Number of Persons in Families*
All Families	**482**	**1,513**
Total Families over Pension Age	**153**	**285**
Married Couples only	**38**	**77**
Single Persons only	**68**	**68**

	Number of Families	Number of Persons in Families
Other Pension Families containing non-pension Persons	47	140
Total Families under Pension Age, by Family Type	328	1,228
Married Couple with Children	146	664
Single Person with Children	19	72
Married Couple without Children	62	125
Single Person without Children	28	28
Other Adult Families	73	339
Of which large families (3 or more children)	31	205
Total Families under Pension Age, by Economic Status	328	1,228
Full-time work or Self-Employed	226	846
Sick or Disabled	24	83
Unemployed	49	200
Others	30	100

Notes:

1. Figures are based on the 1983 mid-year estimates of population and the Continuous Household Survey for 1983 (equivalent to the General Household Survey in Great Britain).
2. As the Continuous Household Survey was not extant prior to 1983, only 1983 figures are given.
3. As sample survey estimates have been 'factored up' to population levels the estimates do not logically admit to the assessment of statistical error.
4. The estimates of the numbers of families are based on the sample survey estimate of 3·14 persons per household.
5. The pensioner status of a household is based on the pensioner status of the head of household.
6. Children are persons under 16 years of age.
7. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 1,000, consequently summations may not necessarily equate exactly with totals.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Viggers: In relation to the following bodies, under section 9 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, regard should be had in the appointment of members to the desirability of including one or more persons with experience of disabled persons and of their being disabled:

Youth Committee for Northern Ireland
Distinction and Meritorious Service Awards Committee
Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Council
Central Medical Advisory Committee
Central Nursing Advisory Committee
Central Dental Advisory Committee
Central Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee
Central Personal Social Services Advisory Committee
Poisons Board
Therapeutic Paramedical Advisory Committee
Clinical Imaging Services Advisory Committee
Clinical Engineering and Medical Physics Services Advisory Committee
Laboratory Services Advisory Committee
Committee for Nature Conservation
Ulster Countryside Committee
Historic Buildings Council
Historic Monuments Council
Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee
Northern Ireland Water Council
Local Government Staff Commission
Committees for Employment of Disabled People

Information on the names of the persons so appointed and which of those persons may be disabled is not at present readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Maltreatment)

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the number of allegations of police maltreatment of prisoners held in their custody under the emergency provisions in Northern Ireland during the years 1975 to 1985 on a year by year basis; how many investigations were held; and how many of the allegations were upheld during the same years, again on a year by year basis.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: This information is not available in the form requested for 1975 to 1985. I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible giving the available information for 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of allegations of police maltreatment of prisoners in their custody in Northern Ireland other than under emergency powers during the years 1975 to 1985 on a year by year basis; how many investigations were held; and how many of the allegations were upheld during the same years, again on a year by year basis.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: The information is not available in the form requested and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Convictions (Evidence)

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of those convicted, on a year-by-year basis, since 1975 on uncorroborated contested confession evidence.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: Courts make their decisions having regard to all the admissible evidence which is placed before them. It is not possible to identify cases in which the eventual decision depended only on accomplice evidence.

Woodlands (Conservation)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on arrangements to ensure the conservation of broadleaved woodlands and on felling licence regulations.

Mr. Viggers [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1987]: Legislative powers are available to enable broadleaved woodlands of high scientific value to be conserved and there is ongoing survey of woodlands to identify those which require special conservation measures. The Department also has powers to make tree preservation orders where appropriate.

The Government have no plans to introduce felling licence legislation.

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what safeguards exist to protect broadleaved and ancient semi-natural woodlands from felling or conversion to coniferous woodland or agricultural land.

Mr. Viggers [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1987]: Truly ancient semi-natural woodland does not occur in Northern Ireland; broadleaved woodland generally is very limited in extent.

Under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland may protect any woodland of high scientific interest either by declaring it to be an area of special scientific interest or by acquiring it as a National Nature Reserve. The Department may also enter into a covenant or management agreement with the owner of a woodland for the purpose of conserving or enhancing the natural beauty or amenity of the land.

The Department also has powers to make tree preservation orders where appropriate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. Alton asked the Lord Privy Seal what progress has been made in the creation of a parliamentary tier to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Biffen: The creation of such a tier would be a matter for parliamentary decision in Westminster and Dublin. The issue remains under consideration.

ENVIRONMENT

Community Refurbishment Schemes

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many community refurbishment schemes have been completed or set up;

(2) if he will give details of a typical community refurbishment scheme, including the different amounts and sources of funds, and the sources of labour; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Community refurbishment schemes normally combine community programme, urban programme and local authority resources to enable unemployed local people to undertake two-year programmes to upgrade the environment on run down council estates. The resources used will vary according to the number of dwellings covered by the scheme, the amount of work carried out and the number of workers involved.

CRS were pioneered by the Department's Merseyside task force in the early 1980s. Eleven schemes have been completed on Merseyside and a further two schemes are in progress. In my Department, estate action (formerely known as the urban housing renewal unit) has extended the CRS initiative to the rest of England and in its first year has developed 10 schemes which are either under way or about to start — in Gateshead, Wigan, Hyndburn, Bradford, Calderdale, Kingston on Hull, Leeds, Coventry, Walsall and Blackburn. It is for local authorities to work up schemes in detail, but estate action is available to advise and has identified over 20 other estates as possible candidates for CRS.

Estate action encourages local authorities to combine CRS with the development of more localised management arrangements and other improvement works as part of a comprehensive approach to turning around unpopular and difficult to let estates. Where appropriate, estate action may make additional resources available to local authorities to help support these other measures.

Housing Development

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether local authorities are required to alter the zoning of open space prior to giving themselves planning permission for housing development.

Mr. Tracey: In considering any proposal for development a local planning authority should have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. In London, where the development for which the authority seeks planning permission would conflict with or prejudice and implementation of the Greater London development plan, or a fundamental provision of the initial development plan for Greater London, or any local plan provision inserted by the Secretary of State, the authority must refer the proposal to the Secretary of State, who may, if he considers the circumstances warrant it, decide to call it in for his own determination. There is, however, no requirement that land shown as open space on a development plan should be reallocated before planning permission is given for housing development.

Home Improvement and Repairs

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to promote home improvement and repairs in the north-west region; and how much is planned to be spent in 1986-87 and 1987-88 on this purpose.

Mr. Tracey: It is for local authorities to decide how much to spend on home improvement and repair from within the resources available to them. The total housing investment programme allocations to authorities in the north-west region, including Merseyside, were £205·47 million for 1986-87 and are £194·29 million for 1987-88. A number of authorities in the north-west have also received additional allocations from the resources set aside specifically for estate action schemes.

In addition, both Care and Repair Ltd. and the National Home Improvement Council's neighbourhood revitalisation services intend to establish agency services in the north-west, to provide practical help with repairs and improvements, as part of the initiative announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction last November. Care and Repair schemes are about to start in Liverpool and Wigan, and NRS discussing with the local authority the possibility of establishing a scheme in Hyndburn.

Betterment Levy

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made since 14 June 1984 in reducing the activities of the administrative unit in his Department collecting betterment levy, following the dissolution of the Land Commission in 1971.

Mr. Tracey: The majority of betterment levy cases still outstanding are subject to statutory postponement or legal charge and do not require frequent attention. The activities and time of staff involved have accordingly been reduced by more than two-thirds since 14 June 1984.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of transactions subject to betterment levy under the Land Commission Act 1967 under consideration by his Department at the latest convenient date; and in how many such cases *(a)* the assessment is determined but still unpaid, *(b)* the assessment is in dispute but still under negotiation, *(c)* the assessment is the subject of proceedings before the lands tribunal or the courts and *(d)* a legal decision has been made but the tax not yet paid.

Mr. Tracey: As at 30 September 1986 the number of betterment levy cases outstanding was 144. Of these:

(a) 139 were determined assessments still unpaid;
(b) five were in dispute but still under negotiation;
(c) there were no cases subject to proceedings before the Lands Tribunal or the courts;
(d) five of the determined assessments had been subject to decisions by the Lands Tribunal, and legal charges were held in a further 38 cases. No legal action had been taken against any of the remainder.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount of betterment levy and interest thereon collected by his Department in the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86; how many full-time staff were involved in assessment and collection; and what was the overall administrative cost.

Mr. Tracey: The amounts of betterment levy and interest thereon collected during the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86 were as follows:

	Levy £	*Interest* £	*Total* £
1984-85	14,607·26	38,878·64	53,485·90
1985-86	56,609·68	26,539·57	83,149·25

Two full-time staff were employed on this work until September 1984; only one member of staff has been substantially involved since that date. The overall administrative costs of collection, including additions for senior and legal staff, are estimated at £25,000 for 1984-85 and £10,000 for 1985-86.

Engineers, Architects and Surveyors (Overseas Earnings)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will estimate for 1984 and 1985 the figures for total overseas earnings of British consulting engineers, architects and surveyors remitted to the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The overseas earnings of British consulting engineers and chartered surveyors net of overseas expenses were £577 million and £92 million respectively in 1984 and £562 million and £99 million respectively in 1985. Figures for architects' overseas earnings are not available.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Ridley: None of the public bodies for which I am responsible has such a statutory requirement.

Gipsies

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will use his powers to require all of the authorities in West Yorkshire to make further provision for gipsies.

Mr. Tracey: Any proposals put to my right hon. Friend by my hon. Friend will be considered on their merits. My right hon. Friend's powers of direction do not, however, extend to the three authorities in West Yorkshire which have already provided more sites than they are required to do by statute.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each district, metropolitan borough and London borough *(a)* the rate support grant for 1987-88 plus the rate support grant for higher tier authorities, including the shire counties, Inner London education authorities and joint boards created in the wake of the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties, distributed to the relevant lower tier authorities in proportion to their relative populations, *(b)* the figure in column *(a)* divided by the population of the authority, *(c)* in 1986 prices the rate support grant paid in 1978-79 plus the rate support grant for any higher tier authority, including the shire counties and metropolitan counties since abolished, distributed in proportion to the then population of the lower tier authority, *(d)* the figure in column *(c)* divided by the then population of the authority and *(e)* the percentage change between column *(b)* and column *(d)*.

Mr. Chope: I shall answer this question shortly.

Defective Housing

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of houses in each local authority areas for which the local authority has received funds for repairs and for buy-back under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Tracey: Under the housing defects legislation central Government contributes towards local authorities' costs in giving reinstatement grants and in buying back designated dwellings. Authorities claim Exchequer contribution a year in arrears, and the payments take the form of annuities payable over 20 years. To date, 138 local authorities in England have submitted claims totalling £2·3 million, but their returns do not give the numbers of dwellings involved.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has had from Leeds city council on the problem of Reema dwellings in the city; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what research he has carried out into methods of rectifying defects in Reema multistorey flats;

(3) if he will make a special capital allocation to Leeds city council to enable rehabilitation or replacement of Reema dwellings to take place; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will issue a circular to local authorities unable to bring multi-storey flats up to his recommended safety standards; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he will treat the problem of Reema construction in the same way as Airey construction, and make special resources available;

(6) if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of Reema dwellings in each local authority area, and the number still occupied in each case.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Riverpoint Hostel, Hammersmith

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why Riverpoint hostel in Hammersmith has not received the grant awarded by the London borough grants scheme;

(2) when he expects the London borough grants scheme to release the grant awarded to Riverpoint hostel in Hammersmith.

Mr. Tracey: This is a matter for the London Boroughs Grants Committee, to which inquiries should be made.

Building Research Establishment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the report on the Building Research Establishment; and if he will publish it.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend will be making an announcement shortly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Control Talks

2. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to receive a report from the United States Administration on the progress of the arms control talks in Geneva.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We are in close and regular contact with the United States Administration on the full range of arms control issues, including the nuclear and space talks at Geneva. I discussed these issues thoroughly with Mr. Shultz 10 days ago and shall be seeing Mr. Kampelman tomorrow.

73. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Renton: The sixth round of the US — Soviet nuclear and space talks began in Geneva on 15 January. We have maintained our close consultations with the US on the issues raised by these talks. After the Reykjavik meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev, the Prime Minister and President Reagan agreed at Camp David on priorities for the way ahead:

(i) an INF agreement, with restraints on shorter range systems

(ii) a 50 per cent. cut over 5 years in US and Soviet strategic offensive weapons

(iii) a ban on chemical weapons.

In all cases effective verification would be essential.

In the area of strategic defence we support the SDI research programme which is permitted by the ABM treaty, and have consulted closely with the US on its handling on the Geneva negotiations. Soviet insistence on making agreement on all issues, including INF, dependent on their demands on SDI is illogical and unacceptable.

The 40th round of the mutual and balanced force reduction (MBFR) talks ended on 4 December 1986 with the East still refusing to give a serious response to the major Western initiative of December 1985. In this we proposed that reductions in forces go ahead before any exchange of information on forces, and that the dispute over existing force levels be resolved in the course of checking compliance. The next round opens on 29 January.

On chemical weapons, the intersessional work of the United Kingdom-chaired committee at the Conference on Disarmament has made further progress towards a total ban.

I visited the Soviet Union on 13-18 January and arms control was among the subjects discussed. My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, will visit the Soviet Union in the spring.

Human Rights

10. **Mr. Woodall** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom delegation to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Helsinki review meeting in Vienna will raise individual human rights cases in discussions with the delegation from the Soviet Union.

Mr. Renton: Our CSCE delegation at Vienna have already raised a number of individual Soviet human rights cases. We will continue to press the Soviet authorities to honour all the obligations they have freely undertaken as signatories of the Helsinki Final Act.

22. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is available to him on human rights in Kampuchea.

Mr. Renton: The information available to us is limited. But we are seriously concerned by reports that abuses of human rights are occurring in Cambodia under the Heng Samrin regime and the occupying Vietnamese forces.

23. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights violations in Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: Large-scale violations of human rights continue. These are documented in the recent report of the United Nations special rapporteur. A report by Amnesty International includes accounts of the complicity of Soviet personnel in the torture of prisoners. We are deeply concerned at these allegations, and have made that concern clear to the Soviet Government.

30. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which human rights organisations in Chile have been visited by United Kingdom diplomatic staff in the past year; and on what dates.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's diplomatic staff have had frequent and continuous contact with the main Chilean human rights organisations, in particular the Chile Commission for Human Rights and the Catholic Church's Vicaria de la Solidaridad.

43. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Soviet proposal for a conference on human rights to be held in Moscow within the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Renton: The Soviet authorities have undertaken to provide further details of their progress at the Vienna CSCE review meeting.

Any meeting of this type on human rights or humanitarian issues would have to offer a real prospect of practical improvement in implementation of CSCE commitments.

50. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there has been any recent improvement in the Soviet record of human rights.

Mr. Renton: Despite the welcome release in recent months of a number of prominent campaigners for human rights, we have seen no fundamental change in Soviet attitudes. Many thousands remain in detention or continue to suffer persecution for their convictions. During my visit to the Soviet Union last week, I urged the Soviet authorities to improve their record on human rights.

54. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any evidence of a change in the Soviet practice of using psychiatric hospitals to incarcerate political dissidents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Soviet authorities continue to incarcerate some individuals in psychiatric hospitals for speaking out about human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. We deplore this pernicious practice and shall continue to press the Soviet authorities to end it.

55. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have made any recent representations to the South Korean Government concerning human rights.

Mr. Renton: I have nothing further to add to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member on 2 December 1986, *Official Report*, volume 106, column *542*.

66. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the leader of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference for security and co-operation in Vienna has had an opportunity to raise individual cases of abuse of human rights during the discussions which are currently taking place.

Mr. Renton: Yes. Both the leader of our delegation and his staff have criticised many different types of human rights abuse and referred to individual cases. Regrettably it is not possible for them to raise more than a small proportion of the many cases brought to their attention.

72. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he has made about the abuse of human rights in Nepal.

Mr. Eggar: We maintain close contact with the Nepalese Government, who are aware of our concern about abuses of human rights.

74. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the latest representations made by Her Majesty's Government to the Government of Sri Lanka regarding human rights.

Mr. Eggar: We ensure that the Sri Lankan Government are very much aware of the concern felt in Britain at the allegations of human rights violations in Sri Lanka. The memorandum attached to my right hon. and learned Friend's speech to the UNGA September 1986 referred to the concern of the members of the European Community.

83. **Mr. Lawrence** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement about the negotiations at the conference on security and co-operation in Europe meeting in Vienna with special reference to human rights.

Mr. Renton: The first Session of the CSCE review meeting in Vienna which ended on 19 December was devoted to a thorough review of the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. The United Kingdom delegation and its Community partners emphasised their concern at the performance of the Soviet Union and some other countries.

When the meeting resumes on 27 January it will complete the review of implementation and move on to discussion of new proposals. In considering such proposals the United Kingdom delegation will be searching for new ways of ensuring better implementation of CSCE commitments in the future.

90. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any representations recently to the Government of Honduras on the subject of human rights.

Mr. Eggar: The Government of Honduras are well aware of our concern about respect for human rights in all countries of Central America.

92. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent contact Her Majesty's Government's official representative has had with human rights organisations in El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: As part of their normal duties Her Majesty's diplomatic staff accredited to El Salvador maintain regular contact with human rights and other organisations including political parties, trade unions and the Roman Catholic church.

Lebanon

12. **Mr. Campbell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the British ambassador in Beirut of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's new initiative to recreate a state within a state in Lebanon.

Mr. Renton: Her Majesty's ambassador in Beirut reports regularly on developments in Lebanon. We deplore the recent fighting around the Palestinian camps and call on all parties to exercise restraint and allow relief workers safely to carry out their essential tasks.

South Africa

13. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a

statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community to encourage reforms in South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Twelve worked continuously to bring home to the South African Government the need for genuine national dialogue. The House will recall, for example my Presidency visits to Southern Africa in July and the adoption in September of further measures signalling our joint concern. Regrettably the South African Government have not yet accepted the case for the fundamental reform which is needed.

20. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to take further steps to assist the front-line states in southern Africa to resist economic pressure from South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We give substantial bilateral aid to the front-line states (£84 million in 1985). We have also pledged £25 million to the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), which aims to reduce its member states' economic dependence on South Africa. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will attend SADCC's consultative conference in Gaborone in February.

37. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Community Council will next discuss the effectiveness of the current European Community sanctions against South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: South Africa was discussed at the last meeting of the European Council, on 5 December 1986. Foreign Ministers of the Twelve will continue to discuss the subject in meetings in European Political Co-operation.

38. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the South African authorities, extensions of controls on the press announced before Christmas and the United Kingdom Government's response thereto.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been a number of expressions of concern about these sweeping new press restrictions. Her Majesty's ambassador in Pretoria made representations to the South African Government on 19 December on behalf of the Twelve in which he deplored the imposition of the restrictions as being contrary to the principles of democracy and freedom of information.

45. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will now withdraw the sanctions imposed on the Republic of South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The restrictive measures we have adopted are designed to bring home to the South African Government the urgent need for fundamental, peaceful change. Regrettably there is no sign at present that they are prepared to take the steps needed to bring about such change.

47. **Mr. Rhodes James** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging reforms in South Africa.

62. **Mr. Norris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community to encourage reforms in South Africa.

87. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in encouraging reforms in South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Twelve worked continuously to bring home to the South African Government the need for genuine national dialogue. The House will recall, for example, my presidency visits to Southern Africa in July and the adoption in September of further measures signalling our joint concern. Regrettably the South African Government have not yet accepted the case for the fundamental reform which is needed.

52. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Anglo-South African relations.

Mrs. Chalker: Our relations with South Africa remain overshadowed by the issue of apartheid. We continue to seek an early end to apartheid in South Africa and its peaceful replacement by a non-racial, representative system of government.

65. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the South African authorities following the latest imposition of further repressive measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's ambassador in Pretoria made representations to the South African Government on 19 December on behalf of the Twelve to express our joint concern at serious abuses of human rights in South Africa. He stated that the Twelve deplored the apparent continuation of forced removals from black townships, the continuing and indefinite detention without charge of large numbers of people and especially of many young people and children and the imposition of draconian new restrictions on press freedom.

Soviet Union

16. **Mr. Gorst** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is available to him on the trends in Jewish emigration permitted by the Soviet authorities.

Mr. Renton: Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union has fallen to an unacceptably low level since its high point in the late 1970s. I met Ambassador Kashlev, head of the Soviet delegation to the CSCE review conference, in Moscow last week and made it clear to him that we expect to see a reversal of this trend.

42. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the consequences for Anglo-Soviet relations of Mr. Gorbachev's declared intention of more openness in Soviet society.

Mr. Renton: The Soviet system is highly intolerant of free information. Greater openness, of which there are some limited signs, would be a significant and encouraging

development. It could help create the conditions for greater mutual understanding between our countries and peoples.

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise with the Soviet Foreign Minister the subject of that country's compliance with its obligations under basket 3 of the Helsinki agreements, with particular reference to the recently published Soviet regulations on emigration from the Union Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Renton: I raised this question during my meetings with Soviet Ministers and officials in Moscow last week. I urged that there should be an increase in the level of Jewish emigration, and that it should become easier for all those who wish to do so to leave the Soviet Union.

Angola

18. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We have full diplomatic relations with Angola.

Barbican (Conference)

19. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the report made by the official of his Department who attended the conference held at the Barbican on 7 and 8 December 1986 addressed by Senor Arturo Cruz.

Mr. Eggar: No. It has not been the practice of any Government to make such reports available.

Gibraltar

21. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his meeting in December with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Sir Joshua Hassan.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. and noble Friend met Sir Joshua Hassan, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, for approximately an hour on 8 December. They discussed a number of issues relating to the economic development of Gibraltar. They also reviewed the progress of our discussions with Spain under the Brussels agreement and prepared the ground for the meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister on 13 and 14 January.

Cyprus

24. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the high commissioner for Cyprus; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Eggar: The high commissioner has regular contact with FCO Ministers and officials.

My right hon. and learned Friend has met the high commissioner on a number of occasions over the past year, the last of which was in November. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend met President Kyprianou for a full discussion last April. We also have frequent contact with the Cypriot Government at official level.

Overseas National (Military Training)

25. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what foreign policy objectives are served by the training in the United Kingdom of military personnel from El Salvador; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: President Duarte's democratically elected Government is publicly committed to strengthening democracy and eradicating human rights abuses. We support these objectives and the offer to train one or two Salvadorean cadets is consistent with them.

53. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department makes of the effect of training in the United Kingdom for officers of the armed forces of other nations on the observance of human rights in those countries.

Mr. Renton: We monitor the human rights situation carefully in all those countries from which officers of the armed forces train in the United Kingdom. However, it is not possible to establish any direct causal relationship between training in the United Kingdom and the observance of human rights in the countries concerned.

Belize

26. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to seek to pay an official visit to Belize.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to visit Belize.

Atlantic Alliance

27. **Mr. Knowles** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the Atlantic Alliance.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Membership of the NATO Alliance is the cornerstone of British security policy. I am confident it will remain so for the foreseeable future. NATO enters 1987 united and in good heart.

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

28. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in promoting the Community's position in international affairs.

67. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in promoting the Community's position in international affairs.

80. **Mr. Crouch** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in promoting the Community's position in international affairs.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Twelve spoke and acted together on a wide range of international issues during the British presidency. Significant achievements during the period included:

—Common action against Syria's involvement in terrorism which I announced on 10 November.

—Active cooperation on East/West issues, in particular, in achieving the successful outcome of the Stockholm conference.

— A common position on South Africa based on promoting peaceful change through national dialogue.

A fuller list of presidency achievements has been placed in the Library of the House.

39. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the main achievements of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Economic Community.

56. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

68. **Mr. Mates** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

69. **Mrs. Kellett-Bowman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

79. **Mr. Normanton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

91. **Sir Anthony Kershaw** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: A full account of achievements under the United Kingdom presidency has been placed in the Library of the House.

Among the most important, I would emphasise:

— The crucial importance of agreement on Common Agricultural Policy reform;

—The adoption of more internal market measures than in any previous half year; and

—The adoption of an action programme for employment growth and agreement on measures to help small businesses.

40. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in tackling international terrorism.

44. **Sir Peter Mills** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in tackling international terrorism.

51. **Sir Philip Goodhart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in tackling international terrorism.

59. **Mr. Butterfill** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in tackling international terrorism.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 12 January, *Official Report*, Vol. 108, col. 7.

82. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the achievements of his presidency of the European Council of Ministers in relation to gaining a settlement of the conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

Mr. Renton: We have remained in close touch with the parties to the conflict and have played an active part in the search for a settlement. The European Community aid and trade measures for the occupied territories announced on 27 October, which we fully support, should encourage economic development and improve the atmosphere for negotiations.

Single European Act

29. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many member states of the European Economic Community have now passed the necessary legislation to implement the Single European Act into their domestic law; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: All member states have passed the necessary legislation to implement the Single European Act into their domestic law. The Single European Act will enter into force on the first day of the month following that in which the last member state ratifies. All member states except Ireland have deposited their instruments of ratification.

Afghanistan

31. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any evidence of east European participation in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Eastern European economic and military assistance in Afghanistan is minimal compared with that of the Soviet Union. We estimate that up to the end of 1986 the total value of east European economic assistance was about $150 million, compared with estimated Soviet assistance of $2·5 billion. Military assistance seems to have taken the form of trucks, medical items, and items such as small arms and ammunition, as well as some military advisers and technicians. In addition, Afghan personnel have been trained in eastern Europe. We have no evidence of east European troops engaging in combat.

76. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent withdrawal of troops by the Soviet Government from Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 3 December 1986, the claimed withdrawal was stage-managed and had minimal military significance. We call on the Soviet Union to withdraw all their troops at the earliest opportunity. This is the key to peace.

78. **Mr. McLoughlin** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the removal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: There has been some progress in the talks held under United Nations auspices, but the Soviet Union and the Kabul regime have prevaricated on the central question of a timetable for the rapid and complete withdrawal of the Soviet occupying troops. We look to the Soviet Union to show the necessary political will to make a genuine, lasting and peaceful settlement possible, in accordance with successive United Nations resolutions.

93. **Mr. Allan Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on progress towards an independent, democratic Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: As I have said in my earlier reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) there has been some progress in the United Nations talks. But the key to lasting peace of Afghanistan remains the prompt and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops and genuine self-determination for the Afghan people. This has yet to be achieved.

95. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: As I previously told the hon. Member on 18 December 1985, we have no substantive relations with Afghanistan.

Following the Soviet invasion in December 1979, we withdrew the ambassador at Kabul and suspended our aid programme to Afghanistan. We continue to seek the restoration of freedom and independence for the Afghan people.

Strategic Defence Initiative

32. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the United States Secretary of State regarding the development of the strategic defence initiative and its relevance to international treaty obligations.

Mr. Renton: As I told the hon. Member on 3 December 1986, we regularly hold discussions with the United States Administration on a wide range of political military issues. The ABM treaty, to which the United Kingdom is not a party, is raised in the course of these discussions as appropriate. My right hon. and learned Friend last met Mr. Shultz on 6-7 January in Bermuda.

Moscow (Prime Minister's Visit)

33. **Mr. John Browne** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an announcement concerning the date of the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to visit Moscow in the spring at the invitation of the Soviet leadership. The dates will be announced in due course.

Caribbean

34. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the dependent territories in the Caribbean.

Mr. Eggar: We are committed to ensuring the good administration of Caribbean dependent territories in accordance with our United Nations obligations and to assisting the transition to independence of those territories which want it.

60. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to seek to visit any of the countries of the Caribbean basin.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend visited Barbados from 1-2 January. He has no plans at present to make further visits to any countries of the Caribbean basin. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is currently visiting Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and Barbados.

88. **Mr. Bob Edwards** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations with Grenada.

Mr. Eggar: We enjoy close and friendly relations with Grenada.

Iran-Iraq War

35. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives he is instigating to try to bring about a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war in the light of the latest casualty figures.

Mr. Renton: This wasteful conflict is of concern to us and to our friends and allies. Many have tried to persuade the combatants to negotiate an end to it. Since bilateral exhortation has had little practical effect, we shall continue to take all suitable opportunities in concert with others and in international fora, notably the United Nations, to promote a ceasefire.

63. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has recently held talks with other European Community Foreign Ministers on the Iran-Iraq war in the light of recent events.

Mr. Renton: The Iran-Iraq conflict figured prominently on the Agenda for discussions at all levels within European Political Co-operation during the British presidency. In particular, it was raised at the meetings of EC Foreign Ministers in London on 10 November and 5 December.

US National Security Council

36. **Mr. Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the staff of the United States National Security Council and the British embassy in Washington.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's Embassy in Washington has a good and close relationship with the National Security Council staff as with other US Government agencies.

Mr. Mordecai Vanunu

41. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any further information from Israeli sources concerning the method of departure of Mr. Mordecai Vanunu from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: No.

Nuclear Weapons

46. **Mr. Cockeram** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government on the future of nuclear weapons in Europe.

Mr. Renton: Nuclear arms control was discussed during the meeting between my right hon. and learned Friend and Mr. Shultz in Bermuda on 6-7 January as part of their regular and continuing consultations on these matters.

India

48. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and India in the light of the recent visit by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton).

Mr. Eggar: We have close and wide-ranging relations with the Indian Government.

The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) visited India on 10-11 December 1986. He had cordial discussions that included detailed discussion of measures to deal with terrorist activities directed against India. My hon. Friend strongly reiterated Britain's firm commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of India. Both sides made clear their view that the encouragement of violence and the stirring of religious and racial prejudice had no place in their democratic societies. The two Governments agreed to hold further discussions on a proposed extradition treaty, and to remain in close touch in dealing with terrorist activities directed against India.

Falklands Fisheries

49. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether licences granted for fishing in the Falklands fishing zone will specify catchable quantities, equipment to be used or any other restriction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No. But the number of licences available for the 1987 fishing season in the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone reflects the conservation requirements of the fishery and takes account of the size, type and equipment of the fishing vessel.

58. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have now applied for licences to fish in the Falkland Islands protection zone.

Mr. Eggar: Applications for licences to fish in the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone were received by the Falkland Islands Government from companies from the United Kingdom, the Falkland Islands, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Chile, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Poland and Taiwan.

Contra Terrorists

57. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact he has had with the United States Administration on the funding of the Contra terrorists.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend regularly discusses important issues, including the situation in Central America, with the United States Administration.

Arms Control Talks

61. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the progress of the mutual and balanced force reduction talks in Vienna.

Mr. Renton: Progress at the MBFR talks has been disappointing as the Warsaw Pact continues to refuse to give a realistic response to the Western proposal of December 1985, in which we made a constructive attempt to break the long-standing deadlock by offering to accept troop reductions without prior agreement on force levels.

Iraq

64. **Mr. Pavitt** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make any trade and financial arrangements with the Government of Iraq conditional on a substantial improvement in that country's human rights record; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have consistently made clear our concern about the human rights situation in Iraq, and will continue to do so on every suitable occasion. We do not believe that linking trade or financial arrangements to the question of human rights abuse will lead to significant improvements in the situation.

BAOR

70. **Sir Michael Shaw** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has discussed with the Foreign Minister of the Federal German Republic any proposals to withdraw short-range nuclear weapons from the British Army on the Rhine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have had no such discussions. It is NATO's policy to maintain the minimum number of nuclear weapons necessary for effective deterrance. We are now implementing the Montebello decision of October 1983 to reduce NATO's non-strategic nuclear warheads by 1,400 by 1988.

Namibia

71. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding the situation in Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: In the last six months we have received representations from various sources regarding the situation in Namibia. These include parliamentary questions and letters from hon. and right hon. Members, non-governmental organisations and members of the public.

Nicaragua

75. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent action he has taken at the United Nations Security Council on Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: We have not initiated any recent action in the United Nations Security Council on Nicaragua.

96. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings his officials have had with representatives of the Nicaraguan Contras; and for what purpose.

Mr. Eggar: As part of their normal duties, members of Her Majesty's diplomatic service have contact with political organisations linked to the Contras.

97. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received regarding the attacks by the Contras on the elected Government of Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No detailed analysis is made of the precise nature of representations made by correspondents. In 1986 we received 188 letters from hon. and right hon. Members and 358 letters from individuals and organisations on the subject of Nicaragua, including attacks by the Contras. In reply, we made it clear that we do not believe the problems of Central America can be resolved by armed force.

Central America

77. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to seek to pay an official visit to central America in the near future.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will be visiting Guatemala on 9-10 February to attend the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of EC-Central America and Contadora Group.

Middle East (Christmas Celebrations)

81. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response has been received to Her Majesty's Government's representations to the Saudi Arabian authorities and the United Arab Emirates to allow Christmas celebrations for Christians living in those countries.

Mr. Renton: We have made no representations to the Governments of either Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates asking them to allow Christmas celebrations for Christians living in their countries.

However, we are concerned that British citizens in all countries should be able to worship privately in accordance with their conscience. Where problems may occur, the embassy monitors the situation closely and endeavours to ensure that suitable arrangements are made.

Naval Exercise (Gulf)

84. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the value of the recent joint naval exercise in Oman in helping to ensure the safety of British seamen operating in the Gulf.

Mr. Renton: The combined manoeuvres held in November and December last year were part of Saif Sareea, a large scale Anglo-Omani exercise. It was not directly concerned with the protection of Gulf shipping and took place over a hundred miles from the Gulf. However the Royal Navy has increased its profile in the Gulf to provide reassurance and, if necessary, assistance to British merchant shipping.

Iran-Iraq (Arms Supply)

85. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received proposing changes in the guidelines which govern the supply of arms to Iran and Iraq and the training in the United Kingdom of their military personnel.

Mr. Renton: I have received a number of letters from hon. and right hon. Members and members of the public, on this subject. We have no plans to change the guidelines which have proved effective in implementing our policy of strict impartiality in the Iran-Iraq conflict and of not supporting the war-making capabilities of either side.

Austrian State Treaty

86. **Mr. Freeson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the exercise by Her Majesty's Government of their obligations as a party to the Austrian state treaty of 15 May 1955.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend about the Austrian state treaty on 30 July 1986. The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend about the same matter on 15 August 1986, and tabled a written question which I answered on 24 October 1986, *Official Report*, Vol. 102, c. *1007*.

Western European Union

89. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the proposal for the reactivation of the Western European Union.

Mr. Eggar: The revival of the Western European Union launched in 1984 is proceeding well. The Paris agencies for the study of defence and security questions have been active since their creation on 1 January 1986. The London secretariat has been slightly expanded to service the increased work load of the council. Further institutional refinements will be implemented in the early part of this year. WEU Foreign and Defence Ministers continue to meet at six-monthly intervals, most recently in Luxembourg in November 1986. Their discussions have shown that WEU has a valuable role to play as a forum for exchanging views on security questions of vital concern to Europe. We have played a prominent part in all aspects of the revival process.

Reykjavik Summit

94. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any immediate plans to meet his United States counterparts to discuss foreign policy issues arising from the superpower summit at Reykjavik and consequent negotiations in Geneva.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to do so. But the talks he had with Mr. Shultz in Bermuda on 6-7 January covered a wide range of arms control issues. We shall continue to consult closely with the United States administration on these matters.

Council of Foreign Ministers

98. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Council of Foreign Ministers will next discuss the 1987 Budget.

Mrs. Chalker: The Budget Council reached a position on the 1987 Budget on 10-11 December. It is for the Belgian presidency to arrange further discussion in the Council should this be required.

Irish Foreign Secretary

99. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Irish Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend sees the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Ireland regularly at European Community meetings. The next such meeting will be in Brussels on 26-27 January. There will be a further meeting in Brussels on 16-17 February.

Iran

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the occasions since January 1985 when Her Majesty's Government or military officials have visited Iran, stating in each case the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Renton: In April 1986 an official from ECGD went to Iran to investigate the possibility of further letters of credit being extended to Peugeot-Talbot.

In July 1986 two officials went from ECGD claims division to try to settle some outstanding claims.

In September 1986 an official from the FCO paid a familiarisation visit to Iran.

There were no visits to Iran by MOD officials within this period.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the official delegations of Government-sponsored individuals or parties from Iran who have visited the United Kingdom since January 1985, stating in each case the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Renton: According to our records, in June 1985 the chairman of the Iranian Centre of Industrial Research and Development, accompanied by two board members, visited the United Kingdom to examine how industrial museums may be used for teaching purposes.

In October 1986 the Iranian Deputy Minister of Energy came to see work being undertaken on renewable energy sources, and to examine the possibilities of Anglo-Iranian co-operation in the setting up of such facilities in Iran.

USSR (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) and, in particular, on his discussions about chemical weapons with the Soviet authorities.

Mr. Renton: I visited Moscow and Leningrad from 13 to 18 January. I had two and a half hours discussion with the Soviet Foreign Minister, as well as meetings with Mr. Bodrynin, head of the Central Committee's international department, First Deputy Foreign Minister Kovalev and other Soviet officials, and a prominent refusnik, Professor Lerner. Arms control was the main subject, but human rights, bilateral and regional questions were also discussed. On chemical weapons, the Soviet authorities confirmed that they wish to continue discussions in Geneva on the basis of the British proposals for challenge inspection.

Visas

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current waiting period for visit visas from applicants in the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Eggar: The vast majority of applications for short-term stays in the United Kingdom are dealt with on the same day. For the small number of applications which require a detailed interview, the waiting time is nowhere longer than five days.

British Phosphate Commissioners

Sir Bernard Braine asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrangements for winding up the office of the British Phosphate Commissioners.

Mr. Eggar: I would draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the Minute laid before the House on 19 January. When the affairs of the British Phosphate Commissioners (first established in 1919) are wound up by agreement between the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the British Government have it in mind to spend the notional interest on their share of the Commissioners' assets to undertake a range of projects of benefit to the small states of the Pacific and elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

International Shipping Protection

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will contribute to the proposed maritime force to protect international shipping in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No formal proposal for an international maritime force has been made. We would envisage considerable difficulties in the organisation and operation of such a force, but any formal proposal would of course, be given serious consideration.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Budget Council

Mr. Key asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community Budget Council.

Mr. Brooke: The Budget Council met in Brussels on 16 January. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council considered compromise proposals put forward in a rectifying letter by the Commission for resolving the differences between the Council and the European Parliament over the 1987 Community budget. The Commission had proposed, among other things, that the maximum rate of increase in non-obligatory expenditure should be exceeded by 62 mecu (£39 million*) for commitment appropriations but should be respected for payment appropriations. The Commission proposed that this should be achieved without cutting back the European Parliament's second reading proposals on substantive budget lines, by making provision for negative reserves of 124 mecu (£78 million) for commitment appropriations and 89 mecu (£56 million) for payment appropriations.

The United Kingdom opposed these proposals and the Council did not agree to them, or to certain variant proposals which were also discussed. The Council's position therefore remains as set out in the Council's second reading budget of 27 November, about which I reported to the House on 2 December 1986, at columns 598-99.

* All conversions in this answer are made at the 1987 Community Budget exchange rate of 1·5939 ecu to the £.

Nationalised Industries (Insurance)

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is Her Majesty's Government policy towards meeting the costs of insurance of nationalised industries.

Mr. MacGregor: All costs arising in the course of the industries' operations are taken into account in the annual investment and financing review, which determines their external financing provision. The results of the review are published in the public expenditure White Paper.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on insurance provision for nationalised industries.

Mr. MacGregor: The appropriate insurance provision for the nationalised industries is a matter for the commercial judgment of the industries' boards. Details of the policies on provision for insurance which they have adopted are normally set out in the industries' annual reports and accounts.

Data Processing Staff

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many data processing staff are in post within the Department of Customs and Excise; and how many of those are trainees.

Mr. Brooke: At 31 December 1986 Customs and Excise had 414 data processing staff in post; of this number 82 were trainees.

Cider Tax

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue from cider tax for each of the financial years 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86; and what is his expectation of the yield for the year 1986-87.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to table 35 on page 56 of the "Report of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise" for the year ended 31 March 1986, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Invisible Earnings

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the actual and the proportionate contributions to the United Kingdom's invisible earnings of the consulting engineering profession during the course of the last financial year.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. 297]: I have been asked to reply.

The overseas earnings of British consulting engineers in 1985 were £562 million net of overseas expenses. This represented 45 per cent. of all net credits earned by United Kingdom consultancy firms and nearly 5 per cent. of all net services credits.

Shipping (Capital Allowances)

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the annual pattern of capital allowances arising over a 10-year period for each £100 million of investment in British owned merchant ships under the tax regime for investment in shipping currently in force; and if he will give the same information in relation to the schemes for 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. capital allowances, respectively, proposed by the shipping industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987]: The annual pattern of capital allowances available for take-up on expenditure of £100 million in 1987-88 under the current regime and under alternative regimes of 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. first year allowances—with 25 per cent. reducing balance writing down allowances thereafter is as follows:

£ million

	Current Regime	*50 per cent. First Year Allowance*	*75 per cent. First Year Allowance*	*100 per cent. First Year Allowance*
1987-88	25	50	75	100
1988-89	19	13	6	—
1989-90	14	9	5	—
1990-91	11	7	4	—
1991-92	8	5	3	—
1992-93	6	4	2	—
1993-94	4	3	1	—
1994-95	3	2	1	—
1995-96	3	2	1	—
1996-97	2	1	1	—

SOCIAL SERVICES

AIDS

114. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating the spread of AIDS.

115. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community to combat the spread of AIDS.

116. **Mr. Aspinwall** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in combating the spread of AIDS.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friends to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 20 January 1987.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice his Department gives to regional health authorities' ambulance officers via the secretary of the Uni-disciplinary Group regarding AIDS.

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue guidelines to ambulance personnel in connection with the attendance upon patients who have developed AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: In answer to inquiries from chief ambulance officers, in February 1985 officials of the Department drew regional health authorities' ambulance officers' attention to the interim guidelines which the Department had issued to health authorities in January 1985 (circular HC(85)2). No further requests for advice were received from members of the Uni-disciplinary Group before publication in June 1986 of revised guidelines (circular HN(86)20) setting out the measures to be taken by health authorities to safeguard the health and safety of people who, because of their work, come into direct contact with AIDS or other LAV/HTLVIII infected patients. Copies of both circulars are in the Library.

Mental Health Act 1982

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress of implementation of the Mental Health Act 1982.

Mrs. Currie: The new Act came into effect in 1983 as the Mental Health Act 1983. Its main provisions became operative on 30 September 1983, and the remaining provisions relating to the powers to remand patients to hospital became operative on 1 October 1984. In December last year my right hon. Friend issued a further circular to local authorities containing directions about the appointment of approved social workers under the Act.

The Mental Health Act Commission was established under the Act with effect from 1 September 1983. Commissioners make regular visits to all hospitals where patients are detained, and they are currently dealing with some 700 individual inquiries and complaints each year and arranging some 2,500 visits for second opinions on treatment. Their first biennial report was laid before Parliament in October 1985, and they have produced a draft code of practice on admissions and treatment and a discussion paper on consent to treatment. Officials are considering the extensive comments received in last year's cconsultation on the draft code of practice, and there will be further consultation before my right hon. Friend presents a definitive code to Parliament for approval prior to publication.

Although the changes the 1983 Act brought about are still recent, in general it is working satisfactorily. We shall keep its operation under review.

Hospitals (Kitchens)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of capital developments providing new kitchens for hospitals built before 1956.

Mrs. Currie: From information collected centrally since 1979 on capital schemes, each costing over £1 million, table (I) shows the number of completed schemes and table (II) the programmed schemes at the planning, design or construction stages with kitchens included in their functional contents. All these schemes replace or develop existing facilities, the great majority of which would have been built before 1956. This information must underestimate the true position because there are many upgrading schemes costing less than £1 million on which information is not readily available.

Hospitals (Kitchens)

Region	
(I) Capital schemes over £1 million in planning, design and construction	
Northern	North Tyneside Sc.3 Phase 1 Hartlepool DGH Sc. 3 Phase 2B
Trent	Glenfield DGH Phase 2 Leicester Royal Infirmary Phase 4B Ilkeston Community Hospital
Yorkshire	Goole New Community Hospital Staincliffe DGH Phase 1 (Nucleus)
N W Thames	Clayponds Geriatric Unit Hemel Hempstead Phase 1 St. Marys W2 Phase 1B
N E Thames	St. Michaels Braintree Phase 2 North Middlesex Kitchen/Dining & Geriatric Acc.
S E Thames	Medway DGH Phase 3B
S W Thames	St. Georges Block H Phase 2A
Wessex	St. Anne's Hospital Canford Cliffs Royal Southants, Southampton Phase 3
W Midlands	St. Cross-Rugby Phase 3 (Nucleus) Bradwell New Geriatric Unit (Nucleus) Bromyard Community Hospital Cheadle New Geriatric Unit Goscote (New Kitchen & Dining Room)
Mersey	North Sefton DGH Southport Phase 1 (Nucleus)
N Western	Manchester Royal Infirmary Ormskirk DGH Phase 1 Queens Park Blackburn Phase 2 Geriatric Whelley Hospital Phase 1 Fairfield Catering and HSDU Tameside General Phase 2
Non RHA	Moorfields Eye Hospital Development Phase 2B Hammersmith Hospital Catering Centralisation
(II) Capital schemes over £1 million completed since 1979	
Northern	South Cleveland General Sch 1 Phase 1
Yorkshire	Grimsby DGH Phase 1
Trent	Leeds General Infirmary Phase 1 Chesterfield DGH Phase 1 Kings Mill DGH Phase 1A Queens Medical Centre Development Phase 2
E Anglian	Hinchingbrooke Hospital Phase 3 Ipswich Phase 1 Heath Road Wing (Nucleus) St. Johns Peterborough
N W Thames	Barnet General Hospital Luton & Dunstable Kitchen & Dining Room Watford (Shrodells) Phase 3
N E Thames	Elizabeth Garrett Anderson
S E Thames	Kent & Sussex—Tunbridge-Wells Phase 1 Lewisham DGH Phase 1A Orpington Phase 1
S W Thames	Manor Hospital Kitchen & Dining Room
Wessex	Blandford Community Hospital Development Phase 1 Odstock Hospital—Rehabilitation & Catering Royal Hants County Winchester Phase 4 (Nucleus) Southampton General Phase 5 Maternity
Oxford	Northampton DGH Phase 2B
S Western	Bristol Eye Hospital Weston-Super-Mare New Hospital
W Midlands	Bromsgrove Redditch DGH Phase. 1 Contract 2 (Nucleus) Dudley DGH Phase 3A (Russell Hall) Kidderminster DGH Phase 5
Mersey	Macclesfield Development (Nucleus) Royal Liverpool Phase 2+3 St. Helens Redevelopment Phase 1 Geriatric
N Western	Fleetwood E SMI Preston New Hospital Phase 1 Royal Albert Edward Infirmary Wigan Phase 1

Note:
HSDU = Hospital Sterile Disinfecting Unit

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which magazines covered by the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising come within the ban on such advertising by reason of the size of their readership among females aged between 15 and 24 years of age.

Mrs. Currie: The following magazines come with the scope of the ban:

Mizz
Just Seventeen
My Guy
Patches
Nineteen
Smash Hits
Look Now
Blue Jeans
Jackie
Hair Flair
Hair & Good Looks Book
Over 21
Company
Elle
Fitness
Hair
Brides & Setting Up Home
Ms London
Honey
Girl About Town
Mother & Baby
Cosmopolitan
Options
Vogue
Horse & Pony
True Romance
Mother

Statutory Sick Pay

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total United Kingdom cost of statutory sick pay in each year since it was introduced.

Mr. Lyell: Statutory sick pay was introduced in April 1983. The latest information available is that payments totalling £440 million and £523 million were made in 1983-84 and 1984-85 respectively. Details for 1985-86 will be available in about three months.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the public bodies for which he is responsible on which the consideration of the appointment or co-option of a person with knowledge of disability is a statutory requirement; if he will name the persons so appointed or co-opted on each body; and if he will indicate which of those persons is a person with a disability.

Mr. Major: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Blind and Partially Sighted People (Registration)

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any proposals for action following a submission sent to his Department by the Royal National Institute for the Blind on 17 July 1986 recommending improvements in registration procedures for blind and partially-sighted people.

Mr. Major: I cannot yet add to my reply to the hon. Member on 12 December 1986, at columns *293-94*.

Mental Patients

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of long-stay patients discharged from each mental hospital in England and Wales since 1981.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows the number of people discharged from each National Health Service mental illness hospital in England after a length of stay of five years or more, for each year from 1981 to 1985. Hospitals containing beds for mentally ill people only have been included. Figures for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales. The figures include patients discharged from one hospital and admitted to another; for example some Rainhill patients have been transferred to other hospitals nearer their homes.

Discharges from hospitals with mental illness beds only of patients having a length of stay of five years or more England—1981-85

District Health Authority	*Hospital*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Northern Regional Health Authority						
South Tees	St. Lukes	1	2	7	9	8
East Cumbria	Garlands	7	5	2	7	9
Durham	Durham County	0	0	0	0	0
South West Durham	Holywood Hall	—	—	2	19	6
	Winterton	14	74	22	20	37
Northumberland	St. George's, Morpeth	7	5	7	7	4
Gateshead	St. Marys'	9	3	7	7	10
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	St. Nicholas	3	3	7	2	4
	Brighton Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Sunderland	Cherry Knowle	8	6	6	6	4
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority						
Scunthorpe	Thorpe Road, Howden	0	0	0	0	—
East Yorkshire	Broadgate	5	4	5	10	11
York	Clifton, Southfield, Fairfield, Moorlands	22	6	11	13	9
	Fulford	0	0	0	—	—
	Naburn, Bootham Park	9	9	9	20	23
Bradford	Waddiloves	0	0	0	0	1
	Lynfield Mount	0	1	1	1	2
	Northern View	2	1	2	2	9
Airedale	Scalebor Park	7	4	3	5	0
Leeds	High Royds, Grassington	13	7	21	68	30
Wakefield	Stanley Royd	14	20	11	6	9
	Newton Lodge	—	—	—	0	0
Trent Regional Health Authority						
South Derbyshire	The Pastures, The Woodlands, Rykneld	17	12	7	16	19
	Etwall	0	0	0	0	0
	Kingsway	13	3	4	30	13
Leicestershire	The Towers	0	6	3	5	4
	Westcotes	0	0	0	0	—
	Carlton Hayes	1	3	6	11	6
North Lincolnshire	The Lawn	1	1	5	0	4
	St. Johns Lincoln	17	18	5	23	22
South Lincolnshire	Rauceby	15	12	6	9	18
Nottingham	The Coppice	7	5	2	13	0
	Mapperley	44	5	6	4	9

District Health Authority	Hospital	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
	St. Francis	0	1	1	1	1
	St. Anns	0	1	1	0	0
	Saxondale	1	4	4	7	14
Barnsley	Kendray	0	1	1	2	3
Doncaster	Loversall	3	2	4	1	2
Rotherham	Swallownest	0	2	0	8	—
	Doncaster Gate	—	—	—	0	0
Sheffield	Whitely Wood	0	0	0	0	0
	Middlewood	16	13	16	22	28
	Northern General, Psychiatric Unit	—	—	1	—	—
East Anglian Regional Health Authority						
Cambridge	Fulbourn, Douglas House	39	32	10	6	7
Peterborough	Dove House	0	0	0	—	—
	Connoly House	—	—	—	0	0
	The Gables, St. Johns ESMI	—	—	—	0	0
East Suffolk	Disturbed Adolescent Unit	0	0	0	0	0
	St. Audry's	15	19	12	15	16
Norwich	Hellesdon	5	3	16	10	3
	Vale	0	4	1	18	—
	St. Andrew's	5	10	26	10	36
	Norvic Clinic (Forensic Unit)	—	—	—	0	0
Great Yarmouth	St. Nicholas	1	1	0	3	4
West Norfolk and Wisbech	Chatterton House	0	0	0	0	0
	ESMI Unit, Bowthorpe	—	—	—	0	0
North West Thames Regional Health Authority						
North West Hertfordshire	Hill End	9	3	8	4	4
Barnet	Napsbury	10	3	3	5	9
	North Gate Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Ealing	St. Bernards Wing, Ealing	30	36	40	47	26
Brent	Shenley	9	12	14	29	17
Paddington	St. Charles	0	0	0	0	0
Riverside	Cassel	0	0	0	0	0
	Horton	17	15	14	11	14
	Banstead	8	14	7	40	49
	All Saints	0	0	0	0	0
	Gordon	—	—	—	—	0
North East Thames Regional Health Authority						
Southend	Runwell	10	8	12	42	52
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	Warley	9	21	14	16	8
Hampstead	Friern Halliwick	11	8	14	9	8
Bloomsbury	St. Lukes Woodside	1	0	0	0	0
City and Hackney	German	1	0	—	—	2
Tower Hamlets	The London Hospital (St. Clements)	3	3	4	0	3
Redbridge	Goodmayes	13	9	13	11	25
Waltham Forest	Thorpe Coombs	0	0	1	0	0
	Claybury	51	42	47	37	38
South East Thames Regional Health Authority						
Brighton	Lady Chichester	0	0	0	0	0
	New Sussex, Brighton	—	0	0	1	0
Eastbourne	Hallingly	17	12	11	16	20
Canterbury and Thanet	St. Augustine's	15	13	11	—	—
	St. Martin's	0	26	—	—	—
Dartford and Gravesham	Mabledon	1	1	2	3	31
	Stone House	3	8	7	2	3
Maidstone	Oakwood	7	10	—	—	—
	Maidstone	—	—	2	9	19
Tunbridge Wells	Sundridge	0	0	0	0	0
Bexley	Bexley	9	9	3	11	9
Bromley	Cane Hill	31	24	33	34	28
West Lambeth	Tooting Bec	8	13	11	13	14
South West Thames Regional Health Authority						
North West Surrey	Ottershaw	0	0	0	0	0
	Abraham Cowley	0	0	—	—	—
West Surrey-North East Hants	Brookwood	17	10	29	13	31

District Health Authority	Hospital	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
South West Surrey	Farnham Road, Guildford	—	0	0	0	0
Mid Surrey	West Park	—	—	10	4	5
East Surrey	Natharne and Fairdene	14	21	17	27	26
Chichester	Graylingwall	—	—	—	11	11
Mid Downs	St. Francis, Larchwood, Colwood	12	10	3	4	6
	Roffey Park	0	1	1	1	—
Croydon	Warlingham Park	7	11	22	14	6
Kingston and Esher	Long Grove	6	6	1	13	11
Wandsworth	Springfield	23	5	10	7	3
Sutton and Merton	Henderson	0	0	0	0	0
Wessex Regional Health Authority						
East Dorset	Hahneman House	0	0	0	0	0
	St. Ann's Poole	0	0	0	0	0
West Dorset	Herrison, Blackdown, 20 Cornwall Road	1	9	7	8	9
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	St. James', Portsmouth Wessex Unit	7	—	—	—	—
	Radnor House	—	—	—	—	0
South West Hampshire and Southampton	Royal South Hants, Dept of Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
	Knowle	10	—	—	—	—
Basingstoke	Basingstoke District, Park Prewett	12	9	24	12	14
Salisbury	The Old Manor	2	0	1	1	3
Swindon	Seymour Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
West Wiltshire and Bath	Roundway	28	18	21	22	19
	Weston Lodge	0	0	0	0	0
Oxford Regional Health Authority						
West Berkshire	Hungerford	1	3	2	1	3
	Fair Mile	13	10	19	11	10
Aylesbury	St. John's, Stone	11	10	10	19	20
Wycombe	Wycombe Shrubbery	0	0	0	0	0
Northampton	St. Crispin	27	17	9	15	12
Oxford	Littlemore, Thorncliffe House	6	4	2	5	5
	Warneford	0	1	0	1	2
	Hurdis House	—	—	—	0	0
South Western Regional Health Authority						
Bristol and Weston	Barrow	1	5	6	4	4
Frenchay	Glenside	6	5	10	7	6
Cornwall	St. Lawrence	7	17	28	—	—
	Trevillis	1	0	2	2	3
	Talvean House	0	0	0	1	0
Exeter	Tiverton Home for the Elderly	—	—	—	0	0
	The Bungalow, Honiton	—	—	—	0	0
	Exe Vale Digby and Wonford	12	16	43	2	6
	Exe Vale Exminster	—	—	—	64	27
	Exmouth	—	—	—	—	0
Plymouth	Moorhaven, The Gables, Derriford	12	13	17	12	12
Torbay	Hendersyde	—	—	—	—	0
Gloucester	Horton Road, Annex 8, Coney Hill, Annex 3	31	31	35	20	18
Somerset	Tone Vale, Halse Moor, Merrifield, Lynchfield	2	9	7	4	12
	Mendip, Meare Manor	31	29	34	22	13
West Midlands Regional Health Authority						
	Barnsley Hall	2	2	6	10	14
Bromgrove and Redditch	Clent Forensic Unit	—	0	—	0	0
Hereford	St. Mary's Burghill	4	12	5	—	—
	Holme Lacy	11	—	—	—	—
Kidderminster	Lucy Baldwin	0	0	0	0	0
Worcester	Powick	1	3	3	3	7
	St. Wulstan's	9	6	10	30	30
Salop	Royal Shrewsbury, Shelton	3	12	18	10	9
Mid-Staffordshire	St. Georges, Stafford	2	7	4	5	12
North Staffordshire	St. Edwards	10	15	22	19	13
South East Staffordshire	St. Matthews	7	9	10	8	9
South Warwickshire	Central, Warwick	9	9	8	16	12
Central Birmingham	Midland Nerve	0	1	0	0	0
	Uffculme Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
	John Connolly	0	1	1	0	1
North Birmingham	Highcroft	17	9	9	10	7

District Health Authority	Hospital	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
West Birmingham	All Saints	4	2	6	15	10
Solihull	Hollymoor	1	0	3	2	7
Walsall	Bloxwich	0	0	0	0	0
Mersey Regional Health Authority						
Chester	Countess of Chester	—	—	—	20	22
Crewe	Moston	0	21	—	—	—
	The Grange, Waverham	—	0	—	—	—
Warrington	Winwick	30	15	25	23	41
St. Helens and Knowsley	Rainhill	64	36	43	64	40
North Western Regional Health Authority						
Preston	Whittingham	3	4	3	4	4
	Ribbleton	0	0	0	0	0
Bolton	Fall Birch	—	—	—	—	0
Central Manchester	Baskell House, York House, High Elms	—	—	—	—	0
	Cheadle Royal	—	—	0	0	0
Rochdale	Springfield Park	—	1	0	0	0
Salford	Peel Hall	0	1	1	2	3
	Prestwich	11	13	21	20	31
Stockport	Ollerset View	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total		1,082	1,047	1,099	1,344	1,333
Special Health Authority						
Bethlem Royal and Maudsley		0	0	1	—	—
Grand total		1,082	1,047	1,100	1,344	1,333

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to receive Sir Roy Griffiths' report on the Government's policy for community care of the mentally ill and mentally handicapped.

Mrs. Currie: As my right hon. Friend announced in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 16 December 1986, at columns *461-62*, Sir Roy Griffiths has been asked to complete his overview of community care policy within 12 months.

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he gives to health authorities on procedure to be followed on the siting of homes for mentally handicapped people within the community; what discussions have taken place between officials of his Department and East Dorset health authority on this subject insofar as it relates to the proposed home at Broadlands, Verndown; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* lists showing *(a)* those long-stay mental hospitals currently approved for closure, *(b)* those long-stay mental hospitals listed in regional strategic plans as proposed for closure before 1995 and *(c)* those long-stay mental hospitals that have been indicated by regional health authorities as possibilities for closure outside the strategic planning period listing in each instance the present number of in-patients.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Abortions

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of abortions carried out in each local authority area for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested cannot be released for reasons of maintaining confidentiality.

Out-patients (Drugs)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he has given London teaching hospitals in connection with prescribing drugs for patients attending out-patient clinics.

Mr. Newton: Long-standing guidance to all health authorities makes it clear that the duty of prescribing for out-patients rests with the doctor who at the time has clinical responsibility for the patient's treatment. When a hospital doctor is responsible he should prescribe; when the clinical responsibility is transferred to the general practitioner then the latter should prescribe.

Smoking (Breast Feeding)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies he has made of the effect of smoking on breast fed babies; and what advice he has given to general practitioners and others involved in community care of mothers who are breast feeding.

Mrs. Currie: Questions about mothers' smoking habits were included in the recent survey of infant and child feeding carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. A report is expected later this year. Health professionals are aware that mothers, including expectant and nursing mothers, should be strongly advised against smoking.

Hepatitis B

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the latest estimate of the number of people in the United Kingdom infected by the hepatitis B virus; and what proposals he has to make available to National Health Service patients the new Belgian genetically engineered vaccine.

Mrs. Currie: Laboratory reports indicate that currently about 1,300 cases a year of hepatitis B are diagnosed. Vaccination against the disease is already available under the National Health Service in certain circumstances. Any company proposing to introduce a new vaccine would first need a product licence. Information about applications for such licences is confidential.

Hospital Admissions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the hospitals in the West Midlands region where restrictions on non-urgent admissions were introduced in 1986, month by month; and how many beds were closed in each case.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority for the information she seeks.

Waiting lists and times for in-patient treatment in the west midlands are falling. There were 79,293 patients waiting at 30 September 1986 compared with a peak of 89,858 in March 1979. The number of non-urgent patients waiting for more than a year fell to 22,174 in September 1986 from a peak of 33,559 in September 1979. My right hon. Friend recently announced a major three-year initiative on waiting lists and times and we anticipate further substantial reductions to be achieved as a result of the positive action planned by regional and district health authorities.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, for each region, all the hospitals that did not admit patients for elective surgery at some time during last year, and the number of days they did not make such admissions in each case.

Mrs. Currie: No comprehensive record of the occasions on which elective surgery has been suspended is kept centrally. There may be a variety of reasons, planned and unplanned, why elective surgery has to be suspended for a short period in a particular hospital. Day-to-day management of facilities within each hospital is a matter for the health authorities concerned.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals in each region are now refusing all but emergency admissions; and what percentage of hospitals this is in each region.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Neighbourhood Nursing

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in how many district health authorities plans have been made to implement the proposals for neighbourhood nursing teams set out in the report of the community nursing review team; how many have already set up such teams; and what information he has about plans by district health authorities to decentralise management of and service delivery by community units.

Mrs. Currie: The organisation of community nursing services is a matter for local decision in the light of local needs and circumstances, and information is not held centrally. Consultation on the report of the community nursing review team extended to the end of December 1986, and comments are still being analysed.

The organisation of management and service delivery within community unit is also for individual district health authorities to determine in consultation with the appropriate regional health authority. Again, no information is held centrally on patterns of decentralisation within community units.

Supplementary Benefit Tribunals (Chairmen)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what payment is currently given to chairmen of supplementary benefit tribunals; and what is now the average total cost of an appeal hearing.

Mr. Lyell: From 1 July 1986 a full-time chairman of a social security appeal tribunal receives a gross salary of £31,850 per annum and a part-time chairman receives £65 gross for a half-day session, plus expenses as appropriate.

It is estimated that the administration costs of the social security appeal tribunal system is of the order of £100 per tribunal hearing.

Neasden Hospital

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the nurses and other National Health Service staff evicted from their homes at Neasden hospital in December are now in National Health Service accommodation elsewhere; and by whom the additional costs to these residents are being borne.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to bring the 30 residences now empty at Neasden hospital into use for the homeless before they deteriorate to the point where they need extra expenditure to restore them to viability.

Mrs. Currie: Neasden hospital is surplus to National Health Service requirements, and a planning application has been made to Brent council. Once that has been determined, the site will be sold as soon as practicable and the proceeds will accrue to the health service. It is for the health authorities concerned to consider possible short term alternative uses consistent with their responsibility for maintaining and securing the site.

NHS (Beds)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how the reduction in the average daily number of National Health Service beds between 1979 and now is distributed *(a)* by region and *(b)* by each district health authority.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now take steps to prevent any further cut back in National Health Service acute beds.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mortality Statistics

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of actual deaths in each week from 1 January to 31 March each year since 1979; what was the expected number of deaths for each of those weeks based on historical experience; and what was the percentage difference between the two.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on the basis of what precise section of primary or secondary legislation he decided that all persons in the relevant categories would receive a £5 exceptionally severe weather payment in the week 12 to 18 January.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what, for a man retiring on average earnings each year since 1978 and who had been contracted into state earnings related pension scheme, was the earnings-related component on top of the flat-rate state pension payable in each of those years.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 12 January 1987, at columns *123-24*.

Social Workers

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the number of whole-time equivalent *(a)* home helps and *(b)* social workers in each local authority, and per 1,000 population over 65 years, each year since 1982;

(2) what has been the number of health visitors per 1,000 elderly people in each district health authority in each year since 1979;

(3) what has been the number of community nurses per 1,000 elderly people in each district health authority in each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have the information that is available as soon as possible.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many limbs were fitted at artificial limb and appliance centres in each month since January 1985;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the progress made towards implementing each of the recommendations of the McColl report;

(3) how many prosthetist appointments at artificial limb and appliance centres have been postponed due to failure to supply limbs in time because of the Hangers dispute;

(4) if he will list the organisations and individuals whose reaction to the McColl report has been obtained during the consultation period; and what are the main conclusions he draws from that consultation;

(5) when the McColl review of artificial limb and appliance centre services was completed; when he first received the report; and why the report was not published until 27 January 1986.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the reforms of the artificial limb service initiated by the National Health Service management board.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the detailed account I gave during the debate in the House on 26 November, at columns 330-332, of the steps we have been taking to improve the artificial limb service.

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list initiatives by his Department which have been of benefit specifically to residents in Leicester.

Mr. Newton: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Auditors)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which regional and district health authorities have employed their appointed auditors or firms with which they are associated to undertake work in addition to that relating to their duties as auditors.

Mr. Newton: The external audit of health authorities' accounts is normally undertaken by the Department's National Health Service audit branch. As an experiment, the Department has contracted with nine accountancy firms to undertake the audit of 14 district health authorities. We have advised these firms that they should not accept other work from the authorities to which they have been appointed.

Health authorities may also engage outside firms to provide their internal audit service. We do not collect information centrally about such arrangements.

Central Middlesex Hospital

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take immediate steps to re-open ward C2 at the Central Middlesex hospital.

Mrs. Currie: Provision of services at the Central Middlesex hospital is a matter for the Brent district health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Brent DHA about the position of ward C2.

King's Fund (Report)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now convene an emergency meeting of the National Health Service management board to consider the report of the King's Fund on inner London health services.

Mr. Newton: The King's Fund report is concerned primarily with the planning of health services in inner

London, and will be taken into account both by the management board and by the four Thames regions as those plans are reviewed and developed.

As the hon. Member is aware, in 1987-88 London will benefit from a special bridging fund of £30 million over two years which has been established, as well as from a share of the growth money recently allocated to the Thames regions. We are pursuing with regions the need to consider the needs of teaching and research and social deprivation when deciding allocations to districts, and these factors are being studied further by the RAWP review team.

Nurses

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take immediate action through the National Health Service management board to recruit nurses for Charing Cross hospital in order to enable the re-opening of its coronary care unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Recruitment is the responsibility of the local health authority. I understand that Riverside health authority is making every effort to recruit suitably qualified nurses.

Hospitals (Patient Statistics)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many hospital in-patients were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1978;

(2) how many hospital out-patients were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1978;

(3) how many hospital day cases were treated in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1978.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table. Further details are contained in Statistical Bulletin 2/86 "NHS Hospital Activity Statistics for England 1974-1985", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

National Health Service hospitals
England

Thousands

Year	*In-patient cases*	*Day cases*	*Total out-patient attendances*
1978	5,370·3	562·2	33,950·3
1979	5,400·1	592·1	34,099·7
1980	5,670·0	670·8	35,243·0
1981	5,759·9	713·9	35,571·4
1982	5,719·6	706·5	35,651·2
1983	6,018·6	813·2	36,519·6
1984	6,177·5	902·9	37,042·7
1985	6,353·8	962·8	37,440·3

NHS (Statistics)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses and midwives were employed in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1978, expressed in terms of whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is shown in the table. Figures for 30 September 1985 are the latest currently available to this level of detail.

Hospital Nursing and Midwifery staff[1] (including agency staff)
England

30 September	*Whole-time equivalents[2]*
1978	313,000
1979	319,300
[3]1980	330,200
1981	347,700
1982	351,900
1983	350,500
1984	350,500
1985	352,500

Source: DHSS Annual Census of Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Includes qualified, unqualified and learners.

[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 100.

[3] During 1980, the standard working week for Nursing and Midwifery staff was reduced from 40 to 37½ hours. No adjustment has been made for the effects of this change.

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors and dentists were employed in National Health Service hospitals in each year since 1978, expressed in terms of whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given him by my predecessor on 3 July 1986 at column *632*.

Provisional figures for 30 September 1986, in whole-time equivalents, are:—

Doctors	34,252
Dentists	1,064

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many general practitioners worked in the National Health Service in each year since 1978;

(2) what was the average number of people registered with each doctor under the National Health Service in each year since 1978.

Mr. Newton: The following is the information for unrestricted principal general medical practitioners in England:

Year	*Number of general practitioners*	*Average number of patients*
1978	21,040	2,312
1979	21,357	2,286
1980	21,812	2,247
1981	22,304	2,201
1982	22,786	2,155
1983	23,254	2,116
1984	23,640	2,089
1985	24,035	2,068
1986	[1]24,460	[2]—

[1] Figure is provisional.

[2] No figure is yet available.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what has been the level of capital expenditure in the National Health Service, at constant prices, in each year since 1978;

(2) how much has been spent on the National Health Service in each year since 1978, at constant prices;

(3) by what proportion expenditure on the National Health Service has increased in real terms since 1978.

Mr. Newton: The table gives National Health Service capital expenditure and National Health Service total expenditure in England at 1985-86 prices since 1978-79. National Health Services total expenditure grew by 26 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1986-87.

£ million

	[1][2]NHS Capital Expenditure at 1985-86 prices (England)	[1][2]NHS Total Expenditure at 1985-86 prices (England)
1978-79	703	12,122
1979-80	674	12,465
1980-81	773	13,515
1981-82	859	13,894
1982-83	830	14,086
1983-84	831	14,281
1984-85	894	14,703
1985-86	924	14,665
1986-87[3]	957	15,313

[1] Expenditure figures revalued in line with the movement in the GDP deflator at market prices.
[2] Including land sales proceeds.
[3] Estimated.

Elderly and Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about practice of local authorities with regard to the housing of elderly and disabled people in groups of four per unit, with two people to a room.

Mr. Tracey: I have been asked to reply.

We have asked local authorities to concentrate their housing resources on those with special needs, including elderly and disabled people. They provide a wide range of accommodation for such people, from ordinary houses and flats to specialised dwellings, grouped schemes and residential homes. It is for each authority to decide what facilities to offer, based on its judgment of local needs and available resources. Neither my Department nor the Department of Health and Social Security requires local authorities to provide information to this level of detail in respect of its housing or residential care provision.

Hospital Expenditure

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give for 1985-86 for each health authority the total expenditure on hospital catering, the total expenditure on services provided to hospitals by private catering companies, the latter figure as a percentage of the former and the difference between that percentage and the percentage in 1984-85;

(2) if he will give for 1985-86 for each health authority the total expenditure on hospital cleaning, the total expenditure on services provided to hospitals by private cleaning companies, the latter figure as a percentage of the former and the difference between that percentage and the percentage in 1984-85;

(3) if he will give for 1985-86 for each health authority the total expenditure on hospital laundry, the total expenditure on services provided to hospitals by private laundry companies, the latter figure as a percentage of the former and the difference between that percentage and the percentage in 1984-85.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 November 1986, c. *128-129*]: The following table, which is derived from the annual accounts of regional and district health authorities, and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, shows their total current expenditure on catering, domestic and cleaning, and laundry services and the expenditure on private contracts included in these totals. The bulk of the total expenditure relates to hospital services but they are not identified separately within the figures for private contract expenditure.

Health Districts	Catering: Total expenditure £	Catering: Private contracts £	Catering: Private contracts Percentage of total	Catering: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Domestic/Cleaning: Total expenditure £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Percentage of total	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Laundry: Total expenditure £	Laundry: Private contracts £	Laundry: Private contracts Percentage of total	Laundry: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85
Northern Region												
Hartlepool	580,320	—	—	—	1,011,928	13,381	1·32	0·02	126,473	—	—	[1]0·01
North Tees	1,009,217	—	—	—	1,189,334	28,428	2·39	2·27	129,533	633	0·49	[1]0·11
South Tees	2,182,833	—	—	—	2,397,324	71,393	2·98	1·75	291,282	2,466	0·85	[1]4·07
East Cumbria	1,219,803	—	—	—	1,479,566	13,637	0·92	[1]0·19	210,446	2,976	1·41	[1]0·46
South Cumbria	1,011,453	—	—	—	909,129	4,849	0·53	[1]0·02	232,491	173,038	74·43	66·41
West Cumbria	1,068,449	—	—	[1]0·23	1,000,564	6,225	0·62	[1]0·92	154,060	421	0·27	[1]0·13
Darlington	1,219,199	—	—	—	1,198,487	8,827	0·74	[1]0·07	215,001	—	—	—
Durham	946,488	—	—	—	1,168,089	11,247	0·98	0·19	154,493	4,591	2·97	[1]1·08
North West Durham	655,406	—	—	—	839,678	5,380	0·64	0·04	114,038	60	0·05	—
South West Durham	1,419,203	—	—	—	1,849,199	7,468	0·40	[1]0·14	275,736	1,197	0·43	0·30
Northumberland	3,024,998	—	—	—	2,872,755	9,484	0·33	0·04	391,832	4,297	1·10	0·96
Gateshead	1,278,162	—	—	—	1,721,926	22,115	1·28	[1]0·06	78,882	—	—	[1]0·08
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,732,705	38	—	[1]0·04	4,637,005	71,707	1·55	0·68	633,140	117,559	18·57	[1]0·91
North Tyneside	977,499	—	—	—	1,170,932	4,955	0·42	[1]0·06	108,764	2,982	2·74	0·71
South Tyneside	893,532	—	—	—	1,198,791	19,482	1·63	[1]0·38	190,704	1,627	0·85	0·46
Sunderland	2,387,291	18,087	0·76	0·72	2,937,638	56,832	1·93	1·44	512,608	9,529	1·86	1·86
Regional Health Authority	41,740	15,923	38·12	30·26	120,140	37,641	31·33	28·84	10,240	10,240	100·00	—
Regional Total	23,648,298	34,048	0·14	0·11	27,683,045	393,051	1·42	0·57	3,829,803	331,616	8·66	3·41
Yorkshire Region												
Hull	1,889,229	—	—	—	2,781,638	157,708	5·67	4·02	324,489	13,548	4·18	0·12
East Yorkshire	1,698,472	—	—	—	1,756,900	97,251	5·54	4·76	253,479	87,303	34·44	25·29
Grimsby	978,775	—	—	—	1,308,016	13,158	1·01	0·09	125,135	1,721	1·38	[1]0·99
Scunthorpe	860,677	—	—	—	1,320,246	13,528	1·02	[1]0·13	220,340	1,269	0·58	[1]0·12
Northallerton	452,671	23,239	5·13	0·83	301,959	11,072	2·21	0·16	61,589	16,328	26·51	[1]5·57
York	2,142,168	—	—	—	2,261,306	103,789	4·59	3·94	299,065	11,842	3·96	[1]0·34

Health District	Catering				Domestic/Cleaning				Laundry			
	Total expenditure £	Private contracts £	Percentage of total	Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Total expenditure £	Private contracts £	Percentage of total	Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Total expenditure £	Private contracts £	Percentage of total	Difference in percentage from 1984-85
Scarborough	775,216	—	—	—	819,632	3,339	0·41	[2]0·05	118,523	12,039	10·16	3·47
Harrogate	1,099,842	—	—	—	1,286,378	98,403	8·16	7·73	141,480	5,184	3·66	[2]0·92
Bradford	2,629,809	—	—	—	2,775,977	165,538	5·96	5·12	417,474	5,657	1·35	[2]0·83
Airedale	1,492,812	—	—	—	1,128,773	10,168	0·90	0·10	215,536	1,114	0·52	[2]1·43
Calderdale	1,335,488	—	—	—	1,092,987	252,462	23·10	22·44	273,491	2,503	0·92	0·10
Huddersfield	1,902,979	—	—	—	2,044,307	48,483	2·37	1·74	301,616	6,030	2·00	[2]0·32
Dewsbury	882,504	—	—	—	1,354,005	6,755	0·50	0·18	194,515	193,870	99·67	33·81
Leeds Western	3,173,915	—	—	—	3,364,387	559,116	16·62	0·48	808,637	17,444	2·16	[2]2·21
Leeds Eastern	2,632,271	—	—	—	3,727,880	49,188	1·32	0·17	,512,634	—	—	—
Wakefield	1,995,139	—	—	—	1,517,449	10,649	0·70	[2]0·43	447,678	144,423	32·26	32·26
Pontefract	943,177	—	—	—	1,276,292	96,003	7·52	6·92	146,849	3,399	1·63	1·29
Regional Health Authority	78,508	—	—	—	183,771	10,757	5·85	1·55	17,214	11,153	64·79	64·79
Regional Total	26,963,957	23,239	0·09	0·01	30,421,803	1,707,367	5·61	3·01	4,879,746	533,829	10·94	6·22
Trent Region												
North Derbyshire	1,796,362	—	—	—	2,016,633	108,748	5·39	5·05	279,122	34,021	12·19	3·83
South Derbyshire	3,776,022	7,362	0·19	[2]0·04	3,563,175	94,207	2·36	[2]0·13	513,426	8,604	1·68	1·18
Leicestershire	5,390,198	2,430	0·05	0·05	5,842,389	94,210	1·61	0·54	676,588	17,953	2·65	[2]0·17
North Lincolnshire	1,862,189	—	—	—	2,330,420	65,675	2·82	2·11	238,776	5,483	2·30	[2]0·70
South Lincolnshire	1,709,095	—	—	—	2,058,503	16,060	0·78	0·21	381,362	1,832	0·49	0·10
Bassetlaw	494,428	—	—	—	661,988	8,249	1·87	0·23	110,866	1,371	1·24	0·12
Central Nottinghamshire	2,027,040	—	—	[2]0·04	2,145,111	17,023	0·79	0·51	327,906	323	0·10	[2]1·97
Nottingham	4,071,183	—	—	—	6,403,547	158,538	2·48	1·01	783,622	2,604	0·33	[2]1·16
Barnsley	1,230,045	4,576	0·37	[2]0·04	1,629,625	16,489	1·01	0·02	289,149	12,491	4·32	0·08
Doncaster	2,038,132	—	—	—	1,518,216	6,193	0·41	0·12	277,598	781	0·28	—
Rotherham	1,313,921	—	—	—	1,448,206	18,315	1·26	[2]0·06	217,923	367	0·17	0·17
Sheffield	5,168,951	—	—	—	6,982,463	73,932	1·06	—	702,151	430	0·06	[2]0·05
Regional Health Authority	79,795	69,813	87·49	3·76	239,354	31,037	21·32	3·47	10,660	3,902	36·60	[2]21·12
Regional Total	30,957,361	84,183	0·27	[2]0·03	36,619,630	718,676	1·96	0·74	4,809,149	90,184	1·88	0·02
East Anglian Region												
Cambridge	2,032,496	—	—	—	2,007,312	859,928	42·84	8·37	322,535	2,924	0·91	0·04
Peterborough	1,672,220	—	—	—	1,586,347	9,422	0·59	0·01	301·384	—	—	—
West Suffolk	1,469,247	—	—	—	1,470,826	110,353	7·50	5·68	392,566	—	—	—
East Suffolk	2,506,704	—	—	—	2,622,832	11,488	0·44	[2]0·12	443,167	167	0·04	—
Norwich	3,723,832	—	—	—	4,082,069	16,305	0·40	0·02	575,594	6,742	1·17	[2]0·23
Great Yarmouth	1,351,327	—	—	—	1,199,886	69,682	5·81	4·96	274,206	262,757	95·82	94·57
West Norfolk and Wisbech	961,688	—	—	—	1,093,117	3,093	0·28	[2]0·36	163,226	152,296	93·30	93·30
Huntingdon	522,519	—	—	—	448,239	324,787	72·46	22·98	136,625	134,102	98·15	1·11
Regional Health Authority	7,956	—	—	—	36,639	31,259	85·32	20·51	927	231	24·92	13·19
Regional Total	14,248,007	—	—	—	14,547,287	1,436,317	9·87	2·83	2,610,220	559,219	21·42	17·72
North West Thames Region												
North Bedfordshire	1,190,267	845	0·07	0·04	1,551,895	6,146	0·40	[2]0·29	237,883	1,096	0·45	[2]4·76
South Bedfordshire	1,484,985	—	—	—	1,746,284	83,636	4·79	3·68	387,001	273,773	70·74	6·88
North Hertfordshire	983,396	—	—	—	1,208,647	10,666	0·88	[2]0·76	130,316	1,587	1·22	0·02
East Hertfordshire	665,932	—	—	—	977,370	77,687	7·95	4·63	277,156	31,134	11·23	[2]2·29
North West Hertfordshire	2,405,588	—	—	—	2,300,163	16,603	0·72	0·41	497,515	51,623	10·38	9·15
South West Hertfordshire	1,781,087	—	—	—	1,996,919	29,699	1·49	0·06	248,823	13,624	5·48	[2]13·73
Barnet	2,812,901	—	—	—	3,512,769	38,180	1·09	0·13	323,658	10,973	3·39	2·71
Harrow	1,334,275	20,713	1·55	0·23	1,630,334	8,407	0·52	[2]1·35	138,109	5,348	3·87	[2]8·50
Hillingdon	1,320,601	—	—	—	2,772,873	138,214	3·71	5·06	201,273	389	0·15	[2]0·40
Hounslow and Spelthorne	1,629,247	—	—	—	2,168,447	466,529	21·51	18·15	502,031	387,294	77·15	46·07
Ealing	1,705,989	—	—	—	2,063,848	362,202	17·55	17·19	280,403	69,444	27·77	24·67
Brent	2,277,128	—	—	—	2,450,794	38,343	1·56	0·76	399,567	—	—	—
Paddington	2,502,185	513,607	20·53	20·53	3,659,712	272,686	7·43	6·74	187,949	3,803	2·02	[2]37·39
Riverside	4,716,604	—	—	—	7,362,083	783,553	10·64	6·75	780,954	170,366	21·82	[2]20·53
Regional Health Authority	41,905	23,307	55·62	15·36	155,164	38,869	25·05	[2]10·67	11,075	3,324	30·01	30·01
Region Total	26,852,070	558,472	2·08	1·90	35,557,306	2,391,442	6·73	4·86	4,603,713	1,023,670	22·24	1·90
North East Thames Region												
Basildon and Thurrock	1,713,332	—	—	—	2,578,289	19,079	0·74	0·09	468,272	61	0·01	0·01
Mid Essex	1,117,126	—	—	[2]0·02	1,652,080	369,411	22·36	19·89	360,441	10,950	3·04	[2]0·14
North East Essex	2,572,195	—	—	—	2,640,199	284,206	10·76	3·98	430,682	1,333	0·31	[2]1·16
West Essex	1,181,742	—	—	—	1,461,104	38,490	2·63	[2]0·08	215,600	2,274	1·05	1·05
Southend	1,647,271	—	—	—	2,213,236	23,741	1·07	0·01	267,195	—	—	[2]44·41
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	2,497,033	—	—	—	3,650,447	132,859	3·64	2·78	462,215	20,703	4·48	0·18
Hampstead	2,336,900	—	—	—	3,124,553	89,103	2·85	1·83	380,070	—	—	—
Bloomsbury	3,976,279	—	—	—	5,464,391	95,676	1·75	[2]0·22	578,211	407,673	70·51	[2]14·38
Islington	1,841,985	7,982	0·43	[2]0·05	2,187,830	15,242	0·70	[2]0·06	230,064	4,507	1·96	0·28
City and Hackney	2,506,122	—	—	—	4,175,440	81,436	1·95	0·25	462,132	42,537	9·20	7·58
Newham	1,158,335	—	—	[2]0·19	1,718,223	7,230	0·42	[2]0·27	197,611	4,415	2·23	0·67
Tower Hamlets	1,896,799	22,400	1·18	0·19	2,822,128	49,728	1·76	0·16	456,275	12,760	2·80	[2]0·61
Enfield	956,305	—	—	—	1,660,839	3,836	0·23	[2]0·89	207,105	4,839	2·34	[2]0·48
Haringey	989,354	—	—	—	1,784,844	12,288	0·69	0·28	349,783	10,630	3·04	0·79

Health Districts	Catering: Total expenditure £	Catering: Private contracts £	Catering: Private contracts Percentage of total	Catering: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1986-87	Domestic/Cleaning: Total expenditure £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Percentage of total	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1986-87	Laundry: Total expenditure £	Laundry: Private contracts £	Laundry: Private contracts Percentage of total	Laundry: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1986-87
Redbridge	1,548,640	4,526	0·29	0·29	1,717,257	243,329	14·17	3·25	317·777	5,999	1·89	1·49
Waltham Forest	2,388,818	—	—	—	3,523,099	16,860	0·48	[1] 0·12	316,003	6,366	1·98	[1] 0·89
Regional Health Authority	97,786	30,665	31·36	[1] 2·07	238,270	25,852	10·85	[1] 6·70	9,085	3,323	36·58	[1] 0·80
Region Total	30,426,942	65,573	0·22	0·03	42,612,229	1,508,366	3·54	1·59	5,708,501	538,280	9·43	[1] 3·54
South East Thames Region												
Brighton	1,953,147	2,672	0·14	0·14	2,275,828	22,354	0·98	[2]0·82	227,872	24,075	10·57	[2]0·67
Eastbourne	1,460,642	—	—	[2]0·10	1,862,680	6,282	0·34	0·06	372,690	36,530	9·80	2·48
Hastings	1,151,651	—	—	—	1,157,181	8,466	0·73	[2]0·03	266,230	3,474	2·06	[2]0·12
S E Kent	1,216,816	—	—	—	1,527,488	38,571	2·53	0·26	430,433	7,188	1·67	0·28
Canterbury and Thanet	2,188,127	—	—	—	2,663,903	597,389	22·43	21·69	704,214	11,814	1·68	0·39
Dartford and Gravesham	1,844,507	—	—	—	2,574,182	130,246	5·06	4·45	488,832	7,025	1·72	[2]0·04
Maidstone	1,371,693	1,329	0·10	0·10	1,359,309	664,567	48·89	30·94	230,104	98,330	42·74	[2]2·54
Medway	1,208,066	—	—	—	957,810	326,445	34·08	1·91	221,737	5,539	2·50	0·51
Tunbridge Wells	1,907,187	—	—	—	2,098,054	21,869	1·04	0·43	378,474	12,364	3·27	[2]15·93
Bexley	1,361,937	—	—	—	1,933,582	44,600	2·30	0·65	293,954	357	0·12	[2]3·17
Greenwich	2,342,443	—	—	—	3,280,297	8,338	0·25	[2]0·05	335,187	2,189	0·65	[2]1·25
Bromley	2,188,401	469,597	21·46	16·29	1,377,708	716,423	52·00	42·29	487,207	18,135	3·72	[2]0·05
W Lambeth	3,215,953	—	—	—	4,069,642	70,402	1·73	1·18	415,211	88,282	21·26	[2]28·77
Camberwell	2,191,432	—	—	—	2,742,192	19,521	0·71	—	332,171	88,447	26·63	5·40
Lewisham and N Southwark	3,391,643	53,198	1·57	0·42	5,144,405	74,126	1·44	0·15	459,992	3,063	0·67	[2]0·66
Regional Health Authority	56,435	46,427	82·27	31·38	98,412	25,154	25·56	[2]8·87	7,094	1,389	22·40	[2]20·90
Regional Total	29,048,080	573,223	1·97	1·32	35,086,623	2,774,553	7·91	4·80	5,571,402	410,419	7·37	[2]2·23
South West Thames Region												
N W Surrey	1,622,466	—	—	—	1,740,302	228,806	13·15	11·89	306,852	209,827	68·38	10·01
W Surrey/N E Hants	1,903,830	—	—	—	1,924,358	29,132	1·51	0·69	150,860	6,427	4·26	2·56
S W Surrey	1,197,070	30,822	2·57	0·23	1,452,682	143,071	9·85	6·58	250,909	3,374	1·34	0·61
Mid Surrey	2,298,920	—	—	—	2,209,862	33,806	1·53	0·36	375,220	721	0·19	[2]0·35
E Surrey	1,935,274	5,112	0·26	0·07	1,762,850	562,889	31·93	23·70	401,869	213,539	53·14	12·91
Chichester	1,285,581	—	—	—	706,150	259,109	36·69	35·34	158,832	3,068	1·93	[2]2·98
Mid Downs	1,644,195	2,517	0·15	0·04	1,337,186	234,925	16·82	8·75	214,466	33,666	15·70	5·85
Worthing	992,285	2,071	0·21	[2]0·11	1,266,048	173,505	13·70	12·21	148,540	8,881	5·98	0·68
Croydon	2,607,135	—	—	—	2,731,962	63,959	2·34	1·41	590,225	269,787	45·71	11·36
Kingston and Esher	1,825,359	24,212	1·33	—	2,507,512	48,253	1·92	0·19	270,028	181,503	67·22	2·27
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	1,213,155	—	—	—	1,514,870	302,176	19·95	17·54	338,771	344,387	95·99	16·05
Wandsworth	3,286,237	8,960	0·27	[2]0·04	4,379,700	17,790	0·41	[2]0·12	478,019	111,348	23·29	[2]3·09
Merton and Sutton	2,576,601	—	—	[2]0·69	2,711,392	631,822	23·30	18·95	620,237	161,661	26·06	[2]5·60
Regional Health Authority	39,657	30,996	78·16	8·40	158,633	158,633	100·00	—	35,730	35,730	100·00	—
Regional Total	24,425,765	104,690	0·43	[2]0·04	26,403,507	2,877,876	10·90	7·78	4,360,538	1,583,919	36·32	4·73
Wessex Region												
East Dorset	2,445,497	—	—	—	2,599,867	50,450	1·94	1·31	535,283	10,412	1·95	[1] 1·35
West Dorset	1,706,999	—	—	—	1,558,109	11,040	0·71	[1] 0·23	271,811	13,282	4·89	2·10
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	3,078,955	—	—	—	3,213,887	11,028	0·34	[1] 0·14	374,725	5,333	1·42	0·21
Southampton and South West Hampshire	3,359,581	—	—	—	4,291,382	20,081	0·47	0·02	625,818	5,201	0·83	[1] 0·29
Winchester	970,230	2,612	0·27	0·16	1,088,342	103,193	9·48	6·30	165,894	12,441	7·50	[1] 75·19
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	1,828,649	—	—	[1] 0·02	2,046,007	5,841	0·29	[1] 0·10	210,405	9,922	4·72	0·19
Salisbury	1,292,910	330	0·03	0·03	1,069,238	3,465	0·32	0·11	165,541	5,508	3·33	[1] 0·38
Swindon	1,334,591	—	—	[1] 0·66	1,360,045	7,393	0·54	0·09	207,534	3,548	1·71	0·11
Bath	2,528,630	—	—	—	2,479,389	11,482	0·46	[1] 0·10	408,690	1,886	0·46	0·46
Isle of Wight	867,159	—	—	—	831,706	8,073	0·97	0·22	150,317	20,489	13·63	[1] 6·91
Regional Health Authority	21,546	12,097	56·14	56·14	50,196	27,736	55·26	[1] 43·06	2,587	2,587	100·00	—
Regional Total	19,434,747	15,039	0·08	0·03	20,588,368	259,782	1·26	0·37	3,118,605	90,609	2·91	(3·99)
Oxford Region												
East Berkshire	1,796,858	—	—	—	2,050,602	15,425	0·75	0·32	407,589	58,751	14·41	0·28
West Berkshire	2,503,595	2,630	0·11	[1] 0·03	2,907,161	62,818	2·16	0·16	322,432	12,607	3·91	3·62
Aylesbury	1,296,602	—	—	—	1,115,602	479,669	43·00	28·79	316,560	256,034	80·88	0·43
Wycombe	845,297	110	0·01	0·01	784,492	20,383	2·60	1·12	216,407	197,766	90·01	2·61
Milton Keynes	418,045	2,745	0·66	0·51	419,749	242,838	57·85	10·08	160,842	5	—	—
Kettering	1,090,394	—	—	—	1,351,034	5,453	0·40	[1] 0·24	322,944	978	0·30	0·08
Northampton	1,939,745	—	—	—	1,970,696	13,552	0·69	0·23	376,213	1,597	0·42	[1] 0·62
Oxford	3,277,159	10,786	0·33	0·03	3,490,202	689,461	19·75	15·94	826,750	8,558	1·04	[1] 5·29
Regional Health Authority	15,818	—	—	—	66,461	23,659	35·60	1·85	4,290	4,290	100·00	—
Regional Total	13,183,513	16,271	0·12	0·01	14,155,999	1,553,258	10·97	6·51	2,934,027	550,586	18·64	[1] 1·67
South Western Region												
Bristol and Weston	2,619,695	—	—	[2]0·08	2,862,402	7,033	0·25	[2]0·09	405,662	7,489	1·85	[2]0·94
Frenchay	2,523,141	432,362	17·14	17·09	2,348,009	7,332	0·33	[2]0·25	319,463	8,444	2·64	[2]0·11
Southmead	1,657,090	—	—	—	2,134,980	19,279	0·90	0·43	375,846	5,488	1·46	0·45
Cornwall	2,120,052	—	—	—	2,746,789	169,670	6·18	5·23	701,205	353,454	50·41	9·46
Exeter	3,483,965	112	—	[2]0·01	2,988,115	14,798	0·50	[2]0·37	419,640	3,461	0·82	[2]0·66
North Devon	780,146	—	—	—	723,718	3,143	0·43	—	175,786	3,467	1·97	0·07
Plymouth	2,361,771	—	—	—	2,710,957	15,731	0·58	[2]0·04	496,299	7,241	1·46	0·73
Torbay	1,161,909	—	—	—	1,385,210	6,776	0·49	0·08	186,484	547	0·29	0·09

Health District	Catering: Total expenditure £	Catering: Private contracts £	Catering: Private contracts Percentage of total	Catering: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Domestic/Cleaning: Total expenditure £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Percentage of total	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Laundry: Total expenditure £	Laundry: Private contracts £	Laundry: Private contracts Percentage of total	Laundry: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85
Cheltenham	920,791	—	—	—	1,061,588	2,286	0·21	*0·11	178,796	126,179	70·57	11·96
Gloucester	1,819,625	—	—	—	2,046,548	2,527	0·12	*0·19	219,226	4,233	1·98	*2·47
Somerset	2,943,759	2,799	0·09	*0·10	2,927,646	431,423	14·74	13·69	423,313	3,308	0·78	0·02
Regional Health Authority	46,668	13,910	29·81	*1·06	113,188	3,316	0·32	0·37	5,225	—	—	—
Regional Total	33,366,612	448,083	1·92	1·91	33,991,148	483,114	2·86	2·18	3,906,923	523,501	13·39	1·82
West Midlands Region												
Bromsgrove and Redditch	849,526	—	—	—	686,329	2,055	0·30	0·03	204,883	1,838	2·20	*30·11
Hereford	1,077,969	2,370	0·21	0·21	624,278	14,740	2·36	2·00	190,710	81	0·04	*0·71
Kidderminster	1,182,200	—	—	—	978,094	3,475	0·36	*0·31	114,657	1,588	1·38	0·57
Worcester	1,516,050	32	—	—	1,624,837	23,191	1·43	0·48	283,568	9,745	3·74	*1·41
Shropshire	2,206,933	—	—	—	2,084,698	8,626	0·42	*0·02	476,033	101	0·02	0·02
Mid-Staffordshire	1,393,213	—	—	—	1,389,230	23,214	1·80	1·19	217,794	4,287	1·97	*1·05
North-Staffordshire	3,009,607	—	—	—	3,999,658	18,278	0·46	*0·06	471,502	14,433	3·06	*0·14
South East Staffordshire	1,553,592	—	—	—	1,125,574	146,561	13·00	10·63	220,736	—	—	—
Rugby	356,855	—	—	—	343,408	2,384	0·97	*0·03	83,310	83,310	100·00	—
North Warwickshire	1,189,867	—	—	*0·09	1,021,757	5,200	0·52	*0·16	348,089	188,241	60·38	0·30
South Warwickshire	1,684,478	1,181	0·07	0·06	1,078,235	98,510	5·87	5·20	236,193	7,804	3·33	0·30
Central Birmingham	2,092,701	90,173	3·13	3·05	2,623,361	60,268	2·30	*0·04	402,336	8,695	2·16	*1·18
East Birmingham	1,100,038	—	—	—	1,324,092	106,515	8·04	6·30	161,339	2,647	1·64	*4·26
North Birmingham	1,314,960	501	0·03	—	1,135,138	35,500	3·23	1·19	246,351	48	0·01	0·01
South Birmingham	2,153,342	—	—	—	2,248,099	23,754	1·06	*0·38	330,227	1,996	0·60	*1·02
West Birmingham	2,434,275	13,282	0·55	0·53	2,695,831	30,635	1·13	0·06	398,101	—	—	—
Coventry	2,555,073	220	0·01	0·01	1,660,015	9,061	0·55	*0·14	385,333	99,173	37·38	0·86
Dudley	1,794,148	3,191	0·18	0·06	1,845,521	49,658	2·66	1·33	364,606	3,846	1·06	0·06
Sandwell	1,086,472	—	—	—	1,286,397	14,109	1·10	*0·21	357,583	9,051	2·53	0·32
Solihull	999,022	—	—	*0·01	1,091,791	108,518	10·03	8·86	279,588	4,192	1·50	0·61
Walsall	1,885,515	10,409	0·56	0·08	1,729,806	27,415	1·58	*0·93	443,342	3,140	0·71	*13·36
Wolverhampton	2,042,023	—	—	—	1,794,463	15,136	0·84	0·18	281,609	990	0·35	*2·41
Regional Health Authority	138,100	—	—	—	174,703	69,196	39·61	*5·02	44,469	30,488	82·03	*2·41
Regional Total	36,633,310	131,311	0·33	0·28	34,734,233	893,603	2·55	1·22	6,485,687	483,784	6·84	*2·40
Mersey Region												
Chester	1,638,542				1,587,034	10,042	0·68	0·03	132,049	5,031	3·81	*4·39
Crewe	1,469,946				1,709,879	218,039	12·79	12·28	279,633	4,781	1·70	*2·38
Halton	503,518				422,487	93,434	22·11	21·56	117,364	9,086	7·74	*5·10
Macclesfield	1,385,670				1,581,511	108,456	6·95	6·12	339,161	5,738	1·69	*0·18
Warrington	2,187,280				1,999,847	471,586	23·58	23·03	467,290	3,739	0·80	*0·04
Liverpool	4,083,323				6,378,772	75,282	1·18	0·13	1,158,672	3,407	0·29	*0·22
St. Helens & Knowsley	2,289,609				2,348,231	46,001	1·96	*0·24	338,938	3,839	0·72	0·33
Southport & Formby	872,949				1,313,037	20,916	1·59	1·23	283,797	2,772	1·33	1·13
South Sefton	1,710,071			*0·01	2,364,064	11,819	0·50	*0·02	289,845	446	0·15	*2·01
Wirral	2,191,397				2,656,075	11,019	0·41	*0·47	1,002,444	450	0·04	
Regional Health Authority	68,976				88,208	47,971	54·38	2·54	12,326	1,549	12·57	2·90
Regional Total	18,602,940				22,427,165	1,115,933	4·98	3·87	4,383,227	40,838	0·89	*0·57
North Western Region												
Lancaster	2,008,466	—	—	—	1,831,622	12,028	0·66	*0·26	386,682	3,367	0·87	0·31
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	1,931,494	—	—	—	1,886,349	7,112	0·38	*0·02	270,456	276	0·10	0·04
Preston	3,480,373	—	—	—	2,446,447	20,833	0·85	0·40	443,968	8,960	2·02	*0·46
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	2,744,194	—	—	—	2,773,727	19,113	0·69	0·20	487,748	1,407	0·29	*0·27
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,292,901	—	—	—	2,981,573	8,712	0·34	0·20	385,102	—	—	*0·05
West Lancashire	905,334	—	—	—	795,546	3,845	0·48	0·30	123,166	—	—	—
Chorley and South Ribble	377,072	—	—	—	513,913	4,394	0·86	*0·03	88,244	388	0·44	*0·90
Bolton	1,690,323	—	—	—	1,472,860	21,394	1·47	0·02	336,927	1,290	0·38	0·38
Bury	746,998	—	—	—	734,765	36,066	7·43	3·96	280,052	261,786	93·48	0·41
North Manchester	2,639,841	—	—	—	2,631,381	23,316	0·89	0·38	314,248	1,191	0·38	*0·22
Central Manchester	1,691,998	—	—	—	1,988,577	30,504	1·55	*0·06	310,319	230,224	43·13	31·19
South Manchester	2,462,593	—	—	—	2,644,562	61,505	2·33	0·30	335,446	237	0·07	*0·10
Oldham	836,815	—	—	—	1,349,488	4,512	0·36	0·19	160,013	4,230	4·24	*3·15
Rochdale	998,290	—	—	—	760,291	12,834	1·69	*0·21	166,751	5,083	4·91	3·33
Salford	3,879,403	—	—	—	2,933,907	64,339	2·20	*1·63	347,552	6,083	0·74	*0·19
Stockport	1,662,588	—	—	—	1,720,487	43,993	2·54	0·33	396,196	36,505	9·21	3·65
Tameside and Glossop	1,012,328	—	—	—	1,235,183	9,146	0·74	*0·49	150,171	6,210	4·14	*0·23
Trafford	1,001,807	—	—	—	991,086	52,522	5·30	*2·28	171,878	4,383	2·55	*2·01
Wigan	1,682,192	—	—	—	1,487,543	6,419	0·43	0·11	387,790	—	—	—
Regional Health Authority	25,329	13,971	55·16	55·16	210,659	35,376	16·79	*6·54	23,554	14,607	2·01	*3·88
Regional Total	31,640,623	13,971	0·04	0·04	32,879,750	498,337	1·52	*0·01	5,854,267	577,225	9·86	2·43
Special Health Authorities for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals												
Hospital for Sick Children	890,598	—	—	—	1,306,426	7,039	0·54	0·29	157,347	10,058	6·40	*4·16
National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	536,583	—	—	—	601,400	10,333	1·72	*0·58	73,073	589	0·76	*2·43
Moorfields Eye Hospital	341,805	—	—	—	430,160	21,349	5·01	*18·57	37,780	3,502	9·27	*25·48
Royal Eye Hospital	803,998	799,087	99·39	31·87	668,072	343,354	51·33	2·10	43,791	42,552	97·17	*2·83
Maudsley Hospitals												

Health District	Catering: Total expenditure £	Catering: Private contracts £	Catering: Private contracts Percentage of total	Catering: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Domestic/Cleaning: Total expenditure £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts £	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Percentage of total	Domestic/Cleaning: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85	Laundry: Total expenditure £	Laundry: Private contracts £	Laundry: Private contracts Percentage of total	Laundry: Private contracts Difference in percentage from 1984-85
National Heart and Chest	901,059	—	—	—	1,020,006	171,338	16·78	15·73	169,330	169,330	100·0	—
Royal Marsden	675,474	—	—	—	796,318	13,456	1·69	+0·20	79,096	6,142	7·77	+0·07
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	1,796,101	—	—	—	1,448,977	486,369	33·57	29·33	230,591	230,591	100·0	31·04
Eastman Dental	58,526	—	—	—	114,567	74,360	64·91	0·57	20,002	16,822	84·10	+9·30
TOTAL	5,068,734	799,087	13·62	3·76	6,336,726	1,327,820	20·95	9·36	812,910	479,566	58·99	5·88

[1] The 1985-86 figures do not include expenditure by family practitioner committees following their separation from health authorities on 1 April 1985. The form of family practitioner committees' accounts does not permit a similar analysis but their total 1985-86 expenditure on contracted out services in these categories was a little over £300,000.
[2] Reductions in percentage between 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Local Offices

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all the social security offices which have closed for either a whole day or days, or parts of a day or days, each month in the last year, in each case indicating the cause.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. *304*]: I regret that the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mucodyne

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what decision he has taken in respect of Mucodyne syrup following the meeting of the Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs held on 28 October.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *706*]: I have accepted the advice of the Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs, following its review of the drug Mucodyne (Carbocisteine), that this drug should not be generally available on National Health Service prescription.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for Defence what liaison has taken place between his Department and the chief fire officer for south Yorkshire or South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority concerning incidents involving radioactive materials.

Mr. Stanley: There is continuing liaison between my Department and the appropriate emergency services concerning contingency arrangements for dealing with incidents which may involve radioactive materials.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the Meteorological Office weather stations, indicating *(a)* minimum night temperatures, *(b)* daily mean temperatures and *(c)* weekly mean temperatures for the weeks 5 January to 11 January and 12 January to 18 January 1987, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will answer shortly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

113. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on achievements made during Britain's presidency of the European Community in reforming the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 12 January at colun n 45.

Beam Trawlers

Mr. Steen asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to complete his full review of restrictive licensing arrangements, with special regard to provisions on beam trawlers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The full review of the restrictive licensing arrangements which is being carried out by the Fisheries Department in consultation with the United Kingdom fishing industry against the background of the new European Community structural measures in the fisheries sector, will take some months to complete. I am, however, aware of my hon. Friend's interest in certain aspects of the restrictions currently applying to beam trawlers in area VII and if, as the review proceeds, it is possible to make a separate announcement on these I shall not hesitate to do so.

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in Brussels on 19-21 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: With my right hon. Friend, I represented the United Kingdom at the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 19 to 21 January.

Much of the meeting was taken up with discussions of the negative monetary compensatory amounts to be applied to pigs, eggs and poultry following the recent EMS realignment conference. A political agreement was finally reached on a compromise under which the new increased negative mcas will be introduced for these sectors tomorrow, 22 January. There is provision for one and a half percentage points of pigmeat mcas to be removed in two stages — 0·5 of a point on 16 February and one point at the beginning of the 1987-88 milk year. For eggs

and poultry the Council will take decisions before the beginning of the 1987-88 year on the basis of proposals which the Commission will be making generally on the agri-monetary system. I insisted throughout this difficult negotiation that there had to be parallel treatment for the United Kingdom in order to safeguard our interests and this was secured.

The Council reached an agreement on the quantity of manufacturing beef to be imported into the Community in 1987 under the balance sheet arrangements. The quantity agreed is 15,000 tonnes of processing beef (of which two thirds is to be for products of particular concern to the United Kingdom manufacturers); in addition a special quota of 8,000 tonnes of high quality beef was agreed. The Commission also repeated its assurance of last year about making beef out of intervention available for manufacturing. The Council also agreed on the import of 168,000 head under the balance sheet for male calves. Given the difficult situation in the beef sector in the Community, these arrangements are a satisfactory outcome for the current year.

The Council discussed and took a number of decisions in principle on arrangements for distributing free food through recognised charitable organisations to the poorest sections of the population who have suffered most from the severe winter. I welcomed this humanitarian action. Several details remain to be clarified by the Commission. Discussions have already taken place with representatives of charitable organisations in the United Kingdom on what administrative arrangement should be best made to ensure that the food is distributed efficiently and effectively to those who are to benefit. We shall announce details of these arrangements as soon as they have been worked out.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 22 January 1987

NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish Language

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends allocating extra finance towards the development of Irish language schools.

Dr. Mawhinney: The procedure for the recognition of any school as a grant-aided school is laid down in the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Any new expenditure would have to be met from within the resources allocated to the Department of Education (Northern Ireland).

Mr. Mallon asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if the use of the Irish language for street and place names is to be afforded a similar status to the bilingual policy operating in Wales;

(2) when he expects to announce the official recognition of street names in the Irish language.

Mr. Scott: Ministers are still considering possible ways in which the demand for dual language street names might be met. Any change in existing arrangements will require legislation, which will be subject to normal consultation before final decisions are taken.

Ministers are also considering what measures might be taken to make Irish language versions of place names in Northern Ireland more widely available.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been introduced specifically as a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Scott: The decisions and administration of government in Northern Ireland continue to be the responsibility of Her Majesty's Government alone, as article 2(b) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement makes clear. It is therefore not possible to attribute decisions specifically to the agreement. Nevertheless, the views and proposals we have received from the Irish through the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference have been an important and constructive contribution to a number of matters. The joint statements issued after each meeting of the conference, copies of which are in the Library, record the subjects which were discussed there.

Maghaberry Prison

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of building and other alterations to Maghaberry prison during 1986; and what are the estimated costs for building and other alterations in 1987.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1987, c. *339*]: Eight hundred and sixteen thousand, four hundred and ninety seven pounds in 1986; the estimated cost for 1987 is £1,894,600.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* for each local education authority in England for pupils of secondary age *(a)* the amount spent within that local education authority on assisted places, *(b)* the number of assisted places, *(c)* the average expenditure per assisted place pupil and *(d)* the percentage of the local education authority budget represented by expenditure on the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The latest available comparative information is as follows. The first three columns relate to the school year 1984-85. The final column takes as its base net institutional expenditure for the financial year 1984-85.

	Expenditure (£) on assisted places scheme schools in the area	*Number of assisted pupils at schools in area*	*Average expenditure (£) per assisted place pupil*	*Assisted places expenditure as percentage of LEA secondary budget*
LEA Local Education Authority				
Barking	—	—	—	—
Barnet	111,024	50	2,220	0·30
Bexley	—	—	—	—
Brent	—	—	—	—
Bromley	209,914	155	1,354	0·90
Croydon	450,099	364	1,237	1·60
Ealing	141,156	103	1,370	0·60
Enfield	—	—	—	—
Haringey	61,815	32	1,932	0·30
Harrow	159,841	122	1,310	1·00
Havering	—	—	—	—
Hillingdon	27,503	22	1,250	0·10
Hounslow	—	—	—	—
Kingston-upon-Thames	131,441	82	1,603	1·30
Merton	171,547	113	1,518	1·20
Newham	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	170,687	129	1,323	0·90
Richmond-upon-Thames	311,236	221	1,408	3·60
Sutton	52,850	46	1,149	0·40
Waltham Forest	153,002	92	1,663	0·60
Inner London	2,841,382	1,770	1,605	1·10

	Expenditure (£) on assisted places scheme schools in the area	Number of assisted pupils at schools in area	Average expenditure (£) per assisted place pupil	Assisted places expenditure as percentage of LEA secondary budget
Birmingham	395,862	313	1,265	0·40
Coventry	199,475	140	1,425	0·60
Dudley	—	—	—	—
Sandwell	—	—	—	—
Solihull	—	—	—	—
Walsall	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	263,460	179	1,472	1·00
Knowsley	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	589,969	425	1,388	1·20
St. Helens	—	—	—	—
Sefton	486,869	356	1,368	1·80
Wirral	567,046	551	1,029	1·80
Bolton	286,067	300	954	1·10
Bury	227,527	264	862	1·40
Manchester	773,498	584	1,324	1·70
Oldham	263,194	241	1,092	1·30
Rochdale	—	—	—	—
Salford	—	—	—	—
Stockport	292,165	239	1,222	1·10
Tameside	—	—	—	—
Trafford	129,437	112	1,156	0·70
Wigan	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	—	—
Rotherham	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	69,397	67	1,036	0·10
Bradford	179,294	155	1,157	0·30
Calderdale	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	161,217	164	983	0·50
Leeds	410,662	308	1,333	0·60
Wakefield	260,430	194	1,342	0·90
Gateshead	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	599,377	527	1,137	2·20
North Tyneside	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—
Sunderland	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—
Avon	1,258,337	909	1,384	1·60
Bedfordshire	495,204	342	1,448	0·80
Berkshire	253,737	169	1,501	0·40
Buckinghamshire	24,562	8	3,070	0·05
Cambridgeshire	412,901	227	1,491	0·80
Cheshire	320,449	245	1,308	0·40
Cleveland	—	—	—	—
Cornwall	162,670	114	1,427	0·40
Cumbria	224,313	98	2,289	0·50
Derbyshire	320,870	146	2,198	0·50
Devon	621,759	416	1,495	0·80
Dorset	212,550	124	1,714	0·50
Durham	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	295,373	200	1,477	0·70
Essex	434,924	144	3,020	0·30
Gloucestershire	75,077	33	2,275	0·20
Hampshire	1,080,446	785	1,376	0·90
Hereford and Worcestershire	614,567	377	1,630	1·00
Hertfordshire	723,505	539	1,342	0·80
Humberside	234,194	203	1,154	0·30
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—
Kent	383,547	210	1,826	0·30
Lancashire	622,453	579	1,075	0·50
Leicestershire	234,586	172	1,364	0·30
Lincolnshire	120,899	101	1,197	0·20
Norfolk	255,881	205	1,248	0·50
North Yorkshire	153,004	81	1,889	0·30
Northamptonshire	273,565	185	1,479	0·50
Northumberland	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	152,141	148	1,028	0·20
Oxfordshire	481,402	316	1,523	1·00
Shropshire	74,890	62	1,208	0·20
Somerset	571,209	357	1,600	1·60
Staffordshire	547,810	348	1,574	0·50
Suffolk	436,590	292	1,495	0·80
Surrey	856,911	502	1,707	1·30
Warwickshire	240,960	209	1,153	0·70

	Expenditure (£) on assisted places scheme schools in the area	Number of assisted pupils at schools in area	Average expenditure (£) per assisted place pupil	Assisted places expenditure as percentage of LEA secondary budget
West Sussex	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	86,568	40	2,164	0·20

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether his Department has carried out any investigation into the change in pupil achievement following the Government's increased support for the assisted places scheme;

(2) what assessment his Department has carried out into the effects of its policy of increased support of assisted pupils on the education system in England.

Mr. Dunn: Changes in individual pupils' achievement cannot be measured directly. However, the Government are satisfied that the broadening of educational opportunities provided by the scheme has been wholly beneficial.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils from each local education authority area who have been awarded assisted places at independent schools have dropped out of the scheme in each year since the scheme's inception.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average expenditure per pupil on the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: £1,603 in the school year 1985-86.

Expenditure

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the cost of teachers' salaries as a proportion of total expenditure on education in each year since 1978-79 and the amount spent by local education authorities on books and equipment over the same period at 1985-86 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The table contains the information. The figures refer to maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Year	Expenditure on Books and Equipment £ million real terms[1]	Teachers salaries[2] as per cent. of net institutional recurrent expenditure per cent.
1978-79	288	69·3
1979-80	267	68·7
1980-81	245	70·2
1981-82	242	70·6
1982-83	251	70·1
1983-84	254	69·7
1984-85	253	69·9

[1] The cash terms for each year have been repriced to 1985-86 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.

[2] Teachers' salaries cost includes allowances, plus the employers' contributions towards national insurance and superannuation.

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing expenditure per pupil since 1974-75 in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* special schools and *(c)* secondary schools in cash terms and at constant prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The available information is given in the following table:

Net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil (£) England

Year	Primary schools		Secondary schools		Special education	
	Cash terms	Real terms[1]	Cash terms	Real terms[1]	Cash terms	Real terms
1974-75	200	635	320	1,020	—	—
1975-76	255	650	395	1,005	—	—
1976-77	290	655	440	985	—	—
1977-78	320	630	475	935	—	—
1978-79	365	650	530	945	—	—
1979-80	425	650	605	925	1,915	2,920
1980-81	545	695	765	980	2,435	3,125
1981-82	615	720	865	1,010	2,755	3,220
1982-83	680	740	940	1,025	3,055	3,325
1983-84	725	760	1,015	1,055	3,255	3,395
1984-85	760	760	1,085	1,085	3,560	3,560

[1] The cash terms for the earlier years have been repriced to 1984-85 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.

Higher Education

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated level of public spending on higher education in 1986-87 in cash terms and at 1985-86 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Public expenditure on higher education which is the responsibility of my Department is estimated as £3,273 million in cash in 1986-87. That figure is equivalent to £3,178 million at 1985-86 prices, revalued by the GDP (market prices) deflator.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are responsible for further public expenditure on higher education.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Caerphilly concerning recruitment in public sector higher education to which holding answers were given on 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *389-90*.

Mr. Dunn: I have replied to a number of these questions today and will reply to the remaining ones as soon as possible.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the number of students in public sector higher education in England and Wales for each of the last five years for which figures are available, divided into the 19 different programmes utilised by the National Advisory Body; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what the numbers of students in public sector higher education have been in the past five years for which figures

are available, in each of the subject programmes, 01, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17, as used by the National Advisory Body; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what the numbers and percentage is of public sector higher education students studying *(a)* in polytechnics and *(b)* in other colleges in each of the last five years for which figures are available in each of the subject programmes utilised by the National Advisory Body.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The information requested is shown in the table. Provisional figures for 1986, when compared with 1985, indicate increases in programme 02 (technology), 04 (science), 08 (mathematics), 09 (business, management and accountancy) and 19 (INSET); and decreases in 01 (engineering), 11 (professional and vocational), 12 (social and admin. studies) and 14 (humanities). Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Public sector higher education: England

	Polytechnics		*Other Colleges*		*All Colleges*
	Number (thousands)	*Per cent.*	*Number (thousands)*	*Per cent.*	*Number (thousands)*
	1981				
Engineering (01)	23·1	41·4	32·7	58·6	55·8
Technology (02)	1·8	42·5	2·5	57·5	4·3
Construction (03)	20·0	64·9	10·8	35·1	30·8
Science (04)	12·3	78·1	3·4	21·9	15·7
Environmental and other sciences (05)	12·9	73·7	4·6	26·3	17·5
Agriculture (06)	Nil	—	1·7	100·0	1·7
Ancillary Health (07)	6·0	48·8	6·3	51·2	12·3
Maths and Computing (08)	9·4	78·9	2·5	21·1	11·9
Business, Management and Accountancy (09)	46·9	53·0	41·6	47·0	88·5
Catering and Home Economics (10)	2·5	45·3	3·0	54·7	5·5
Other Professions and Vocations(10)	2·8	60·4	1·8	39·6	4·6
Social and Administrative Studies (11)	21·3	79·2	5·6	20·8	26·9
Languages (13)	3·6	78·2	1·0	21·8	4·6
Humanities (14)	9·1	44·2	11·5	55·8	20·6
Art (15)	2·8	48·0	3·0	52·0	5·8
Design (16)	6·2	58·0	4·5	42·0	10·7
Performing Arts (17)	1·2	23·0	4·0	77·0	5·2
ITT (18)	8·5	31·0	18·9	69·0	27·4
INSET (19)	5·8	31·1	12·7	68·9	18·5
	1982				
Engineering(01)	23·7	40·5	34·9	59·5	58·6
Technology(02)	2·0	44·5	2·5	55·5	4·5
Construction(03)	19·9	65·8	10·3	34·2	30·2
Science(04)	13·4	78·8	3·6	21·2	17·0
Environmental & other sciences(05)	12·9	71·9	5·0	28·1	17·9
Agriculture(06)	Nil	—	1·8	100·0	1·8
Ancillary Health(07)	6·2	50·4	6·1	49·6	12·3
Maths & Computing(08)	10·1	78·7	2·7	21·3	12·8
Business Management and Accountancy(09)	47·0	52·7	42·2	47·3	89·2
Catering and Home Economics(10)	3·0	47·8	3·2	52·2	6·2
Other Prof + Voc(11)	2·9	61·2	1·8	38·8	4·7
Social & Admin Studies(12)	22·8	79·5	5·9	20·5	28·7
Languages(13)	4·2	78·3	1·1	21·7	5·3
Humanities(14)	10·4	44·0	13·3	56·0	23·7
Art(15)	3·0	44·3	3·7	55·7	6·7
Design(16)	6·6	52·9	5·9	47·1	12·5
Performing Arts(17)	1·4	24·2	4·3	75·8	5·7
ITT(18)	7·9	30·8	17·6	69·2	25·5
INSET(19)	6·6	32·2	14·0	67·8	20·6
	1983				
Engineering (01)	23·7	40·2	35·3	59·8	59·0
Technology (02)	2·1	42·6	2·9	57·4	5·0
Construction (03)	20·4	66·0	10·5	34·0	30·9
Science (04)	14·4	80·1	3·6	19·9	18·0
Environment and other sciences (05)	13·4	74·4	4·6	25·6	18·0
Agriculture (06)	Nil	—	1·9	100·0	1·9
Ancillary Health (07)	6·9	51·4	6·5	48·6	13·4
Mathematics and Computing (08)	11·5	78·7	3·1	21·3	14·6
Business Management and Accountancy (09)	50·1	53·2	44·1	46·8	94·2
Catering and Home Economics (10)	3·3	51·7	3·1	48·3	6·4
Other Professions and Vocations (11)	2·8	58·2	2·1	41·8	4·9
Social and Administrative Studies (12)	23·9	78·3	6·7	21·7	30·6
Languages (13)	4·3	77·2	1·3	22·8	5·6
Humanities (14)	11·5	46·7	13·1	53·3	24·6
Art (15)	3·1	41·2	4·3	58·8	7·4
Design (16)	7·1	47·9	7·7	52·1	14·8
Performing Arts (17)	1·6	26·4	4·5	73·6	6·1

	Polytechnics		Other Colleges		All Colleges
	Number (thousands)	Per cent.	Number (thousands)	Per cent.	Number (thousands)
ITT (18)	8·3	32·9	16·8	67·1	25·1
INSET (19)	7·2	32·8	14·7	67·2	21·9
		1984			
Engineering (01)	24·2	41·4	34·1	58·6	58·3
Technology (02)	2·2	43·8	2·8	56·2	5·0
Construction (03)	20·0	66·4	10·2	33·6	30·2
Science (04)	14·7	80·0	3·7	20·0	18·4
Environmental and other sciences (05)	14·4	72·5	5·5	27·5	19·9
Agriculture (06)	Nil	—	2·0	100·0	2·0
Ancillery Health (07)	7·2	52·4	6·6	47·6	13·8
Maths and Computing (08)	13·1	76·5	4·0	23·5	17·1
Business Management and Accountancy (09)	50·9	52·6	46·0	47·4	96·9
Catering and Home Economics (10)	3·2	49·8	3·2	50·2	6·4
Other Prof + Voc (11)	3·1	57·7	2·3	42·3	5·4
Social and Admin Studies (12)	24·5	77·3	7·2	22·7	31·7
Languages (13)	4·9	77·1	1·5	22·9	6·4
Humanities (14)	10·0	48·5	10·6	51·5	20·6
Art (15)	3·0	39·0	4·8	61·0	7·8
Design (16)	7·2	46·5	8·3	53·5	15·5
Performing Arts (17)	1·8	26·2	5·0	73·8	6·8
ITT (18)	8·7	33·3	17·3	66·7	26·0
INSET (19)	7·1	32·7	14·7	67·3	21·8
		1985			
Engineering (01)	24·5	42·1	33·6	57·9	58·1
Technology (02)	2·1	42·8	2·8	57·2	4·9
Construction (03)	20·3	66·9	10·1	33·1	30·4
Science (04)	15·5	80·0	3·8	20·0	19·3
Environmental and other sciences (05)	13·7	71·5	5·5	28·5	19·2
Agriculture (06)	Nil	—	2·2	100·0	2·2
Ancillery Health (07)	7·3	50·5	7·2	49·5	14·5
Maths and Computing (08)	14·3	78·3	3·9	21·7	18·2
Business, Management and Accountancy (09)	53·4	52·1	49·1	47·9	102·5
Catering and Home Economics (10)	3·2	48·8	3·4	51·2	6·6
Other Professions and Vocations(11)	3·1	59·9	2·0	40·1	5·1
Social and Administration Studies(12)	4·9	77·0	1·5	23·0	6·4
Languages (13)	24·8	77·6	7·2	22·4	32·0
Humanities (14)	16·8	62·4	10·1	37·6	26·9
Art (15)	3·1	39·8	4·7	60·2	7·8
Design (16)	7·4	45·9	8·8	54·1	16·2
Performing Arts (17)	1·5	23·5	5·0	76·5	6·5
ITT (18)	9·5	34·6	18·0	65·4	27·5
INSET (19)	7·7	25·8	22·2	74·2	29·9

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of students in higher education studying fine art in each of the last five years for which figures are available, divided into the university and public sector of higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The available information is shown in the following table. Figures for university postgraduates are not collected in this detail. Numbers of part-time university undergraduates are so small they have not been provided in order to preserve confidentiality.

Higher education, fine art enrolments

Academic year beginning	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Universities[1] (Great Britain)	870	857	830	789	n/a
Public sector full-time (England)	4,769	5,253	5,573	5,467	5,252
Public sector part-time (England)	115	152	199	335	327

[1] Full-time undergraduates.
n/a Not yet available.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the percentages and full-time equivalent numbers of public sector higher education students in *(a)* full-time study, *(b)* sandwich study, *(c)* part-time evening and *(d)* part-time day, in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The required figures are as follows:

Public sector higher education enrolments: England

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986[1]
Full-time (thousands)	151·0	162·2	172·2	178·5	183·0	185·5
Percentage of total	41·0	42·2	42·8	43·5	42·8	41·8
Full-time equivalents	151·0	162·2	172·2	178·5	183·0	185·5
Sandwich (thousands)	52·8	55·6	58·5	59·6	59·2	60·0
Percentage of total	14·4	14·5	14·5	14·6	13·8	13·5
Full-time equivalents	47·5	50·1	52·6	53·7	53·3	54·0
Part-time day (thousands)	122·4	123·2	127·7	129·5	138·3	147·4
Percentage of total	33·2	32·1	31·7	31·6	32·3	33·2
Full-time equivalents	49·0	49·3	51·1	51·8	55·3	58·9
Part-time evening (thousands)	42·1	43·2	44·2	42·4	47·5	50·9
Percentage of total	11·4	11·2	11·0	10·3	11·1	11·5
Full-time equivalents	8·4	8·7	8·8	8·5	9·5	10·2
All modes (thousands)	368·4	384·2	402·6	410·0	427·9	443·8
Full-time equivalents	256·0	270·2	284·7	292·4	301·1	308·6

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what the percentage change in the number of first year students on public sector higher education courses in the three areas of art, design and performing arts has been in the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The information requested is as follows. Provisional figures for 1986 indicate that the overall total for the three subject areas has increased from 12·4 to 13·4 thousand.

Public sector higher education: England
first-year students.

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Art (Thousands)	2·5	3·1	3·2	3·2	3·4
Percentage change on previous year	—	23·3	2·9	0·7	5·4
Design (Thousands)	3·7	5·2	5·9	5·9	6·4
Percentage change on previous year	—	38·8	13·7	0·2	7·5
Performing Arts (Thousands)	2·2	2·4	2·5	2·7	2·6
Percentage change on previous year	—	5·1	5·7	7·2	−1·9

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the number and percentage of students aged 21 years and over who have been in public sector higher education in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what is the number and percentage of mature students aged 25 years and over who have been in public sector higher education in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: Figures for each of the last five years for number and percentage of mature students in public sector higher education are shown in the table. Figures for 1986 are not yet available.

Public sector higher education: England

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Students[1] Aged 21 & over (Thousands)	221·1	225·3	236·7	241·8	261·9
Percentage of Total	60·0	58·6	58·8	59·0	61·2
Students[1] Aged 25 & over (Thousands)	114·0	117·1	124·4	125·9	139·6
Percentage of Total	31·0	30·5	30·9	30·7	32·6
All Students (Thousands)	368·4	384·2	402·6	410·0	427·9

[1] Part-time students have each been counted as one.

School Funds

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of Sate for Education and Science if he will investigate steps taken by Bradford council to prevent schools spending money raised by the efforts of their staff, parents and children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has asked his officials to make inquiries of Bradford local education authority. I shall write to my hon. Friend when these inquiries are concluded.

Science Budget

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will give the figures for the proportion of his Department's science budget allocated to each of the constituent colleges of the University of Wales for each year since 1979; and what is the projected figure for 1987-88;

(2) if he will give the figures for the proportion of his Department's science budget allocated to institutions in Wales, other than the University of Wales, for each year since 1979; what is the projected figure for 1987-88; and if he will name these institutions;

(3) if he will give the figures for the amount allocated from his Department's science budget to *(a)* the constituent colleges of the University of Wales, and *(b)* other institutions in Wales for each year since 1979; and what is the projected figure for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The research councils have been asked for this information. I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the figures for the percentage rise in the science budget of his Department for each year since 1979; and what is the projected rise for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The figures are as follows:

Year	*Science budget cash £ million*	*Percentage rise each year*	*Science budget at constant prices £ million 1986-87*	*Percentage variation each year*
1979-80	340	14·9	565	−1·7
1980-81	393	15·6	551	−2·4
1981-82	451	14·8	575	+4·4
1982-83	482	6·9	574	−0·2
1983-84	516	7·1	588	+2·4
1984-85	546	5·8	597	+1·5
1985-86	587	7·5	605	+1·3
1986-87	615	4·8	615	+1·7
1987-88	657	6·8	634	+3·1

University of Wales

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the figures for the actual percentage rise in the funding for each of the constituent colleges of the University of Wales since 1979; and what is the projected percentage rise for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The percentage rise in Government funding in cash terms through Exchequer grants and home students' fees between the academic years 1979-80 and 1984-85, the latest year for which the information is fully available, for the constituent colleges of the University of Wales is as follows:

	Per cent.
Aberystwyth University College	44
Bangor University College	54
Cardiff University College	70
St. Davids, Lampeter	71
Swansea University College	43
University of Wales College of Medicine	49
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	43
University of Wales Central Registry	32

The funding of the colleges in 1987-88 has not yet been determined.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the figures for the recurrent grant to for each of the colleges of the University of Wales for each year since 1979in real terms; and what is the projected percentage rise for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: Recurrent grant paid to each of the colleges of the University of Wales for each year since 1979-80 in real terms (at 1985-86 prices using the GDP deflator) is shown in the following table.

The University Grants Committee has not yet allocated recurrent grant for 1987-88.

Academic years

(£'000)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*[1]
Aberystwith University College	10,247	10,971	10,222	11,444	11,808	11,547	10,993	10,226
Bangor University College	11,117	11,802	11,621	13,299	12,098	12,707	11,881	11,753
Cardiff University College	17,329	18,606	16,296	19,411	19,520	22,219	18,283	17,222
St. David's Lampeter	1,504	1,775	1,742	2,617	2,585	2,087	2,076	1,994
Swansea University College	13,960	15,037	14,288	14,991	14,710	14,488	14,975	13,934
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	8,492	9,568	8,176	9,835	10,001	9,662	9,063	8,624
Welsh National School of Medicine	6,613	6,757	6,842	7,375	7,117	7,023	7,071	6,819

[1] Based on grant paid to date. Further distributions of grant are expected.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of his Department's university equipment grant was allocated to the University of Wales in each year since 1979; and what is the projected figure for 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: The furniture and equipment grant allocation by the University Grants Committee to the University of Wales in each year since 1979-80, as a proportion of the total such grant allocated by the committee to universities, is as follows.

Academic year	*per cent.*
1979-80	5·4
1980-81	5·7
1981-82	5·4
1982-83	5·9
1983-84	6·0
1984-85	5·0
1985-86	5·5
[1]1986-87	4·5

[1] Based on grant payments to date.

The University Grants Committee has not yet made allocations for 1987-88.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table based on table 3.12.1 of the public expenditure White Paper Cmnd. 56-II with all figures converted to 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is set out in the table. The figures have been revalued using the GDP

(market prices) deflator, which is assumed to rise by 3·75, 3·5 and 3·0 per cent. respectively in the years 1987-88 to 1989-90.

The figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 in the table have been calculated by revaluing the unrounded planning figures for those years. All figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest £1 million.

Department of Education and Science Programme
Analysis by broad economic category

£ million at 1986-87 prices

	1981-82 outturn	*1982-83 outturn*	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*	*1985-86 outturn*	*1986-87 estimated outturn*	*1987-88 plans*	*1988-89 plans*	*1989-90 plans*
3.12.1	78	84	88	92	97	100	104	107	111
Departmental running costs	42	41	52	53	54	55	56	56	55
Running costs receipts	−2	−2	−2	−2	−2	−2	−2	−2	−2
Other public sector pay	9,570	9,506	9,511	9,492	9,398	10,293	10,352	10,439	10,387
Transfers to the personal sector	3,267	3,239	3,272	3,247	3,140	3,193	3,238	3,239	3,574
Purchases of assets, goods and services	2,172	2,328	2,397	2,374	2,254	2,346	2,273	2,344	2,362
Transfers to the corporate sector	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payments overseas	56	56	75	67	70	69	86	86	82
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	15,105	15,168	15,294	15,232	14,913	15,954	16,004	16,157	16,130
Contribution to total public sector capital spending	811	817	790	797	805	868	686	652	651

ENERGY

Sizewell B (Report)

7. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to publish the Sizewell B inspector's report.

Mr. Peter Walker [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 November 1986, c. 7]: My right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) made it clear on 24 January 1983, at column 253, that my predecessor appreciated the strength of the case for a debate on the report of the Sizewell inquiry. In view of this I have asked the Leader of the House to arrange a debate so that I may hear the views of this House before I reach my decision. I shall publish the inspector's report on Monday 26 January, and place copies both of the full report and of a summary in the Library of the House and in the Vote Office.

I should like to express my gratitude to Sir Frank Layfield, his assessors and the inquiry secretariat for this comprehensive report.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish weekly from 1 January an input-output table of spent Magnox reactor fuel and depleted uranium/plutonium stocks arising from the throughput at the Windscale B205 reprocessing plant at British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether there have been any delays in the dispatch of spent nuclear fuel from nuclear plants in the current year due to snow and ice on the rail network.

Mr. Goodlad: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department has made any assessment of the maximum length of time spent nuclear fuel can be safely stored and monitored at nuclear reactor sites when severe weather conditions prevent the safe transport to Sellafield.

Mr. Goodlad: Irradiated fuel can be safely stored and monitored at nuclear reactor sites for prolonged periods of up to several years.

UKAEA (Trading Fund)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library a copy of each of the programme letters drawn up in relation to the setting up of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority trading fund in 1986.

Mr. Goodlad: The programme letters themselves are commercially confidential. Summaries are being prepared and will be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Electricity Supply (Isle of Thanet)

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the reasons for the failure of the supply of electricity to the Isle of Thanet from 14.15 on Friday 16 January to 02.00 on Saturday 17 January; and what steps are to be taken to ensure that a recurrence of this failure is rendered impossible in the future.

Mr. Goodlad: The Electricity Council has informed me that the failure of supply of electricity to the Isle of Thanet was due to the loss of both circuits of the 132 kV line from Richborough. The failure was caused by an exceptional combination of freezing fog and salt on the insulators which led to arcing and the breakage of one insulator string and damage to conductors. Electricity board linesmen worked into the night in most difficult and dangerous conditions to restore supplies.

The industry is carrying out an investigation and will consider what steps should be taken to reduce the risk of a recurrence.

Sweden

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he or his officials last visited Energy Ministers or officials in Sweden; and if he will make a statement on what was discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State visited the Swedish Minister for Energy in 1985. A range of energy issues, including energy efficiency and the environment, were discussed.

One of my officials visited Sweden in December 1986 as part of an International Energy Agency team to discuss possible participation by Sweden in a collaborative information project.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will initiate an inquiry into the effects of the recent severe weather on the emergency services near Calder Hall nuclear power station and, in particular, into *(a)* the effect of heavy snow falls and icy conditions on the mobility of vehicles required for evacuation purposes, *(b)* measures to ensure that under such weather conditions emergency personnel do not spend sufficient time within the disaster area to receive a fatal radiation dose and *(c)* the effect of such weather conditions on the mobility of fire engines; and what is his assessment as to whether the current emergency arrangements for a nuclear accident are adequate;

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the feasibility under the severe weather conditions recently experienced of extending the emergency plans for Sellafield and Calder Hall beyond the immediate area for which a detailed plan exists in the event of a worst case reactor accident.

Mr. Goodlad: British Nuclear Fuels Limited plc is required by the terms of its licence under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 to satisfy Her Majesty's nuclear installation inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive of the adequacy of the emergency arrangements for Sellafield, including Calder Hall. Evacuation is the responsibility of the police, who can call on emergency services as necessary. Those concerned will be considering if there are any new lessons to be learned from the recent severe weather conditions.

EMPLOYMENT

Small Firms

Mr. John Browne asked the Paymaster General what measures Her Majesty's Government have introduced since 1979 which directly assist the small firms sector.

Mr. Trippier: Our measures have concentrated on tackling the particular disadvantages faced by people setting up a new business or expanding an existing small firm.

Finance

The availability of finance to small firms has been improved by:

1. The loan guarantee scheme started in 1981, which aims to provide finance to viable businesses which fail to get commercial financial backing. Individual term loans up to £75,000 are made available for between two and seven years, with a Government guarantee on 70 per cent. of each loan. Small businesses in most sectors are eligible. The 1986 Budget extended the scheme for a further three years and reduced the cost to borrowers by halving the premium on loans.

2. The business expansion scheme, started in 1983, provides income tax relief on new equity investment in unquoted companies. The scheme was extended in the 1986 Budget and targeted better towards genuinely risky enterprises.

3. The venture capital scheme encourages the provision of finance by enabling individuals and investment companies to claim income or corporation tax relief on losses incurred on disposal of new shares issued by unquoted trading companies.

4. The enterprise allowance scheme, started in 1982, encourages unemployed people to start their own businesses. It pays an allowance of £40·00 per week for up to a year. More than 200,000 people have already started up businesses with the help of the scheme. There is now greater emphasis on business advice, counselling and training for people in EAS.

Premises

5. The small workshops scheme was designed to stimulate private sector investment in small industrial premises. From March 1980 to March 1983, a 100 per cent. initial building allowance was given for capital expenditure on the construction of workshops not exceeding 2,500 sq ft. The scheme was extended for a further two years for premises not exceeding 1,250 sq ft, and ended, as planned, in March 1985. Research indicates that the scheme led to a substantial increase in premises for small businesses.

6. English Industrial Estates Corporation has concentrated on providing premises for small businesses (up to 2,500 sq ft). Special rental and tenancy agreements have been devised to meet the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs. EIEC works with a number of public sector agencies — the Department of Trade and Industry, the Development Commission, universities and the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies.

Training

7. The Manpower Services Commission has provided training courses for the self-employed and small business man since 1977, but since 1984 the volume and range of provision has greatly increased to give over 50,000 training places in 1986-87. For business start-ups there are the business enterprise and new enterprise programmes; for established business projects there are the private enterprise and management extension programmes; and for graduates there are the graduate enterprise programme, and the graduate gateway programme.

Government purchasing

8. The Government have improved small firms' access to information about purchasing Departments, their procedures, requirements and points of contact. A Department of Employment booklet on "Tendering for Government Contracts" has been supplemented by some individual Departments' own publications and information published on Prestel. Tendering and approval procedures have been simplified by exempting suppliers to most Government Departments from normal approval procedures for contracts under £10,000, allowing non-approved firms to tender for non-urgent contracts subject to subsequent approval, and regular reviews by Departments of tender lists to encourage new suppliers.

9. The Ministry of Defence launched in 1986 a small firms initiative to increase competitive opportunities for small firms. This includes the creation of the small firms advice division in the procurement executive to supervise the initiative, provide a focal point for developing MOD policy towards small firms, and provide advice and assistance to small firms; a small firms research initiative to enable small firms able to generate innovative products and processes cost effectively to obtain a larger share of MOD research funds; appointment of small firms representatives to the boards of MOD research and development establishments; steps to ensure all local MOD purchasing officers are keenly aware of the initiative; and plans to hold a conference or regional seminars to explain the initiative to small firms.

Innovation

10. The Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology, started in 1986, aims to encourage small firms

and potential entrepreneurs to bring forward highly innovative ideas that cannot attract existing sources of funding. This competitive scheme is being run by the Department of Trade and Industry on a one year trial basis in biotechnology and instrumentation.

Taxation

11. The ability of individuals to start businesses and develop them has been improved by a wide range of tax changes. Capital gains tax exemption limits have been increased to £6,300. Retirement reliefs have been extended to cover retirement at 60, retirement through ill health and disposal of shares in family holding companies of trading groups. Indexation has been improved and extended as have rollover reliefs. Reliefs have also been introduced to facilitate the incorporation of businesses, and losses on loans made for business purposes can now be offset against capital gains tax.

12. Significant changes to capital transfer tax were introduced between 1979 and 1985 to increase thresholds from £25,000 to £67,000 and increase rate bands. From 1981, only transfers within the preceding ten years were taken into account in assessing cumulative total CTT liability. In 1986, the charge on lifetime gifts was abolished and the tax was renamed inheritance tax with the threshold increased to £71,000 with further increases in rate bands. These changes will further facilitate the transfer of a business from one generation to the next without the need to dilute assets to meet the consequent tax liability.

13. Income tax relief is available on personal borrowings raised to make investments in partnerships, close companies, cooperatives and employee buy-outs. Relief is also available for interest on loans to partners buying plant and machinery for use in their partnership business.

14. Losses incurred in any of the first four years of trading by a new business carried on by an individual can qualify for special income tax relief. This can be obtained against earnings during a three year period before the new trade started.

15. Expenses incurred in the process of setting up a new business are now deductible from subsequent trading profits so long as the expenditure is undertaken in the three years prior to the start up.

Deregulation

16. Two White Papers "Building Businesses . . . Not Barriers" (Cmnd. 9794) and its predecessor "Lifting the Burden" (Cmnd. 9571) included detailed proposals for improvements in areas such as planning, VAT collection and employment law, and have generally aimed to simplify business dealings with Government. The enterprise and deregulation unit at the Department of Employment is co-ordinating action, for example in reviewing licensing and local legislative procedures, and a new system monitors the compliance costs of new regulations to business.

17. Planning authorities have been urged through Department of Environment circulars to approve applications for small business development, unless there are strong and specific objections. For example, Department of Environment circular 14/85 on development and employment reaffirmed the principle of presumption in favour of development, and urged planning authorities to have special regard to the needs of small firms and the self-employed.

18. Simpler and more flexible building regulations came into force in England and Wales in November 1985. Small detached buildings with floor area less than 30 square metres and with no sleeping accommodation are now exempt from control.

19. Measures have been introduced to ease the burden of employment protection legislation on employers, particularly small employers. A longer qualifying period is now required for unfair dismissal complaints.

20. Industrial tribunals are now required to take account of the size and administrative resources of a firm in deciding on the fairness or unfairness of a dismissal.

21. Changes to the maternity reinstatement provisions have included relieving firms with five or fewer employees from the obligation to reinstate an employee where it is not reasonably practical.

22. Redundancy rebates have been retained for firms employing fewer than 10 employees.

A number of changes have been made to Health and Safety Executive and Department of Health and Social Security regulations and procedures to ease burdens on small employers:

23. Raising the threshold for the requirement to prepare written safety policies to firms of 20 employees and above.

24. Giving specific training to inspectors to increase awareness of small firms' interests.

25. Designating one of the Health and Safety Commission commissioners to represent small firms' interests.

26. A small firms working group sub-committee has been set up to consider new leaflets geared to small firms, ways of seeking out unregistered small firms, and the training of local authority health inspectors in the problems of small firms.

Information required from small companies has been reduced by:

Information

27. Under the Companies (Accounts) Regulations 1979 particulars of turnover are no longer required to be included where annual turnover is less than £1 million.

28. The Companies Act 1981 further reduces the amount of detailed financial information that small companies must file with the Registrar of Companies and simplifies the arrangements for approval of company names.

29. The Government have announced their intention of relaxing the rules governing the amount of information small companies are required to disclose in their accounts within the constraints of EC law and Inland Revenue needs. They also intend to extend the Companies Act definition of a small company to the maximum allowed under EC rules.

Advice

30. The small firms service has been greatly expanded and improved since 1979. The service provides advice and information to small firms. Particular developments have included more small firms centres and counselling teams, a factsheet system, and a computerised database. Since 1985, the service has concentrated on specialist counselling skills and supplementing the work of local enterprise agencies.

31. Encouragement has been given to the growth of local enterprise agencies, independent private sector led organisations which provide help and advice to small firms. Full relief from corporation tax is given for business contributions (in cash or kind) to LEAs in the United Kingdom approved by the Government. A major five year scheme of financial assistance started in 1986, aims to establish a network of viable self supporting agencies. (Similar financial assistance has also been made available to LEAs in Scotland and Wales through, respectively, the Scottish Development Agency and the Welsh Development Agency.)

32. The Council for Smaller Industries in Rural Areas provides rural small businesses with advice through 32 offices on local opportunities and conditions, business management, marketing and technical advice, skill training and financial services.

33. Outside consultancy advice is subsidised in the business and technical advisory services run by the Department of Trade and Industry which provides subsidised consultancy to small and medium sized firms on productivity, design and quality assurance. BTAS was extended to include marketing from September 1986.

34. The business improvement services package of schemes, run by the Department of Trade and Industry, aims to help small firms in areas affected by job losses in particular industries — steel, textiles, shipbuilding, deep sea and tin-mining areas. Grants are available for consultancy advice on marketing, financial management, the application of computers and licensing in of products and processes, as well as for common services for groups of small firms and for investment projects.

Support in particular sectors

35. The Government sponsor the Co-operative Development Agency. Sponsorship of the CDA was extended in 1981 and 1983. The Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act 1984 extended the agency's mandate for a further six years and gave it limited additional powers.

36. The small engineering firms investment scheme operated in two phases to help small engineering firms to invest in certain types of advanced capital equipment. The scheme cost about £130 million.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Marlow asked the Paymaster General if he will tabulate by Manpower Services Commission region the numbers of long-term unemployed who have left the register since the restart programme began; and what was the figure for the equivalent period in 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The following table gives the number of claimants by Manpower Services Commission region who ceased to claim as unemployed and who had been unemployed for over one year, between 10 July 1986 and 11 December 1986. The comparable figures for 1985 are for the period 11 July 1985 to 12 December 1985. This information is also in the Library.

The comparison of numbers of people who ceased to claim between July and December this year and the corresponding period last year is influenced by a whole variety of factors, including changes in the economic climate, as well as by programmes such as restart.

Manpower Services Commission

Region	*Number of claimants July to December 1985*	*Number of claimants July to December 1986*
South East	34,504	38,828
London	38,324	44,809
South West	19,241	21,289
West Midlands	34,376	38,027
East Midlands	29,434	33,798
Yorkshire and Humberside	30,242	34,296
North West	45,550	52,584
North	20,570	24,493
Wales	18,113	21,503
Scotland	33,244	34,620
TOTAL	303,598	344,247

These figures are drawn from computerised records. Equivalent figures for claimants with clerical records are not available.

Engineering Industry

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General if he will list the number of apprentices undertaking training by the Engineering Industry Training Board from 1979 to the present date; what has been the product of the training levy each year over the same period; and what steps he proposes to take to ensure more training and more skills for industrial areas generally and the west midlands in particular.

Mr. Trippier: The Engineering Industry Training Board maintains a record of those trainees registering for basic craft and technician training. The figures for the period from 1979 to the present date are given in table 1.

Total employment in the engineering industry has fallen by approximately one third since the late 1970s, and the proportion of people employed as craftsmen and technicians has declined by about the same amount.

Apprenticeship is not the only route of craft and technician jobs. YTS already enables a substantial amount of intial skills training to be carried out, and the expanded two-year scheme will provide increased opportunity for flexible training relevant to employers' needs.

The product of the Engineering Industry Training Board's training levy for each year over the same period is given at table 2. The totals are broken down into levy from the mainstream engineering industry and the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Construction Industry.

Employers have the responsibility and are best placed to identify their own skill needs and ensure an appropriate volume and quality of training at all levels, but the Government are providing substantial help through its £1½ billion training programmes for young people and adults. In the west midlands region approximately £108 million was spent on training programmes in the financial year 1985-86 and forecast expenditure for the financial year 1986-87 is estimated at approximately £119 million.

Table 1—Registrations

Year	*Registrations*
1978-79	27,758
1979-80	26,186
1980-81	23,153
1981-82	17,547
1982-83	12,888
1983-84	11,664
1984-85	10,321
1985-86	10,558

Note:
This figure includes trainees outside the engineering industry who are registered to E17B for certification purposes.

Table 2—Product of Engineering Industry Training Board Levy (£ million's)

Year	*Mainstream*	*MEECI*	*Total*
1978-79	17·05	3·23	20·28
1979-80	17·26	4·58	21·84
1980-81	14·15	3·15	17·30
1981-82	24·38	3·34	27·72
1982-83	22·70	3·35	26·05
1983-84	13·14	3·87	17·11
1984-85	14·56	4·24	18·80
[1]1985-86	11·99	4·31	16·30

[1] Figures for 1985-86 are estimates only.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster General (1) if his Department will set up an inquiry into the reasons for, and effects of, the recent chemical spillage in Southampton;

(2) if his Department has any plans to change the present regulations concerning hazardous substances in residential areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Investigation of the incident by inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive began within hours of the incident being reported on 15th January 1987 and is continuing.

Any implications of this incident for the relevant regulations will be considered.

Household Bleach

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received on the inclusion of

household bleach, under the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I have not received any representations about the inclusion of household bleach under the Classification, Packaging and Labelling of Dangerous Substances Regulations 1984. The provisions of the regulations apply to such bleaches.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Gazumping

Mr. Heddle asked the Attorney-General if he has received a copy of the Law Commission's conveyancing standing committee's recommendations concerning the practice of gazumping; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have received a copy of the document referred to in my hon. Friend's question. I hope that buyers and sellers of houses and flats, and those advising them, will give favourable consideration to the pre-contract deposit agreement recommended by the committee.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufactured Imports

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of consumer expenditure is on imported manufactured goods.

Mr. Alan Clark: The proportion of import content of consumer expenditure varies from year to year. However estimates of finished manufactured consumer goods in the first eleven months of 1986 totalled £13·7 billion compared with £12·0 billion in the equivalent period of 1985. These figures represent 18 per cent. and 16 per cent. respectively of total imported manufactured goods.

It is possible to estimate the import content of consumer expenditure only as a part of a five-yearly compilation of input-output statistics. The latest figures relate to 1979 and the figures for 1984 are due to be published next year.

Airbus Project

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce a decision on funding for British participation in the A330/A340 Airbus project.

Mr. Pattie: The Government are at present aiming to reach a decision by the end of the first quarter of this year, and the House will be informed thereafter.

Japan (Trade Surplus)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress made during Britain's presidency of the European Community to maintain pressures on Japan to act to reduce trade surplus.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) yesterday.

SCOTLAND

Community Physiotherapists

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many community physiotherapists are employed by each health board; and what was the date of the first appointment in each area.

Mr. John MacKay: Information collected centrally does not identify community physiotherapists separately. The total number of physiotherapists (whole-time equivalents) employed by each health board in Scotland is shown in the table below. Physiotherapists based in the community are included under the "non-hospital based" heading but some hospital based staff will also undertake community visits.

Physiotherapists: Whole Time Equivalent at 31 March 1986

	Hospital based	*Non-hospital based*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	37·1	23·1	60·2
Ayrshire and Arran	70·0	—	70·0
Borders	16·4	4·1	20·5
Dumfries and Galloway	15·8	4·3	20·1
Fife	47·6	12·7	60·3
Forth Valley	36·2	7·9	44·1
Grampian	72·4	10·1	82·5
Greater Glasgow	266·2	38·3	304·5
Highland	37·4	4·1	41·5
Lanarkshire	67·8	22·3	90·1
Lothian	165·6	36·8	202·4
Orkney	4·0	—	4·0
Shetland	6·0	—	6·0
Tayside	70·7	5·5	76·2
Western Isles	11·6	—	11·6
Scotland	924·8	169·2	1,094·0

Roads

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total mileage of trunk motorways in Scotland in use, under construction, and planned as at 1 April 1986.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows: In use, 136; Under construction, 9; Planned, 28.

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the total United Kingdom expenditure on roads is spent in Scotland.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

Some 13 per cent. of total expenditure (capital and current) on national and local roads in the United Kingdom in 1986-87 is expected to be in Scotland.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department has made any assessment of the maximum length of time that spent nuclear fuel can be safely stored and monitored at nuclear reactor sites when severe weather conditions prevent safe transport to Sellafield.

Mr. Lang: Irradiated fuel can be safely stored and monitored at nuclear reactor sites for prolonged periods of up to several years.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether there have been any delays in the dispatch of spent nuclear fuel from nuclear plants in the current year due to snow and ice on the rail network.

Mr. Lang: I am advised by the South of Scotland electricity board that, because of the difficult road and rail conditions, a planned movement of irradiated fuel was postponed from Wednesday 14 January to Wednesday 21 January 1987.

Dornoch Firth Rail Crossing

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the recent submission made by his Department to the European regional development fund in respect of the proposed Dornoch firth rail crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The United Kingdom regional development programme 1986-90 is the latest United Kingdom document in a series required of all EEC member states as the basis for assistance from the European regional development fund. The "Scottish Profile", one of 17 volumes, includes all major infrastructure proposals which, at the time of preparation of the document, were believed to be potential candidates for the period to 1990. The proposed Dornoch firth rail crossing was included in order that the case for European regional development fund assistance should not be prejudiced in the event of British Rail deciding at some time in the future to proceed with the project.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Pollock asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had about services for the mentally handicapped in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: On 8 January my noble Friend, the Minister of State, held informal discussions with representatives of Greater Glasgow, Forth Valley and Lothian health boards, and Strathclyde, Central and Lothian Regional Councils about services for the mentally handicapped in their areas, and in particular the prospects of increasing the rate of discharge from the larger hospitals of those mentally handicapped patients who would benefit from community care.

My noble Friend made plain that the Government envisage a continuing role for mental handicap hospitals for those patients who require specialist medical and nursing care. There will be a substantial role for both the health services and local authority services, and also for the voluntary sector, in the care of mentally handicapped people. Co-operation in both the planning and delivery of services is essential.

The Government recognise that, in the light of the continuing debate about this very important subject, it is desirable to encourage a wider understanding of their position as set out at the meeting on 8 January. Accordingly a statement of Government policy towards the mentally handicapped was subsequently sent to the Scottish Health Service Planning Council and to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I have placed copies of this statement in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Vehicles

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of South Yorkshire as to how many car accidents there have been in South Yorkshire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshireshire as to how many car accidents there have been in Hampshire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(3) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Devon and Cornwall as to how many car accidents there have been in Devon and Cornwall police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Kent as to how many car accidents there have been in Kent police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(5) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Merseyside as to how many car accidents there have been in Merseyside police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(6) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Greater Manchester as to how many car accidents there have been in Greater Manchester police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(7) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of West Yorkshire as to how many car accidents there have been in West Yorkshire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(8) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Humberside as to how many car accidents there have been in Humberside police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(9) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Nottinghamshire as to how may car accidents there have been in Nottinghamshire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)*

injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(10) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Cheshire as to how many car accidents there have been in Cheshire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit;

(11) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Lancashire as to how many car accidents there have been in the Lancashire police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; as to the total number of people who have died as a result and as to how many of these accidents occurred in the course of police pursuit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information on accidents involving police vehicles giving rise to death or injury has not previously been available centrally, but statistics are being collected centrally with effect from 1 January 1987. The chief constables for nine police forces have been able to supply the information given in the table below for accidents involving police vehicles in 1986. Information for previous years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The chief constables of Kent, and of Devon and Cornwall, have not been able to provide the information requested.

	Number of fatal accidents	*Number of people killed (including police officers)*	*Number of accidents involving serious injury*	*Number of accidents (fatal and serious) involving pursuits*
Hampshire	0	0	[1]67	n/a
Merseyside	4	6	10	1
Cheshire	1	1	4	1
Lancashire	2	2	16	4
South Yorkshire	1	1	5	1
Humberside	0	0	9	0
West Yorkshire	1	1	17	3
Nottinghamshire	0	0	10	n/a
Greater Manchester police[2]	1	1	6	n/a

[1] Includes all accidents in which injury was involved, however slight.
[2] Figures from 1 August 1986 to 31 December 1986.
n.a. = not available.

Alcohol Consumption

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the annual alcohol consumption per head in each of the member countries of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Waddington: Information on alcohol consumption per head is not collected on a regular basis by the statistical office of the European Communities. However the Brewers Society publishes information of this kind in its annual statistical handbook. Table K7 of the 1985 edition, a copy of which is in the Library, gives figures of alcohol consumption per head in 1984 in each of the European Community countries (excluding Luxembourg). The figures for individual countries are inevitably subject to the margins of error which are inherent whenever different sources of data of different qualities and using different definitions are brought together.

Computer Network (Data Transfer)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer to the Department of Health and Social Security; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place;

(2) in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer to the Inland Revenue; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place;

(3) in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place.

Mr. Hurd: A Government data network is being considered as a means of minimising the data communications, development and running costs of Government Departments (initially up to four). Electronic Data Systems is one of several companies which responded to a request for information issued by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. No proposals have yet been received, and a consortium which includes Electronic Data Systems is only one of a number of consortia invited to submit proposals. There are at present no plans to use such a network, if it were established, for exchange of information between the Home Office and the Inland Revenue.

Strip Searches

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to collect centrally and publish comprehensive information on the frequency of strip-searching of women held in custody, the purpose of each search, comparable statistics for strip-searching of men held in custody, the number and nature of unauthorised substances or items revealed by each strip search and comparable statistics of unauthorised substances or items revealed by routine security measures.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans to do so.

R. v. Joe Benjamin

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to introduce legislation following the decision of the Court of Appeal on 19 December 1986, the case of R. v. Joe Benjamin, that a person may be imprisoned for refusing to be bound over to keep the peace following an acquittal and where the charge of breach of the peace has not been tried.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Electoral Areas

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the timetable for the further interim review of parliamentary constituency boundaries at present being undertaken by the Boundary Commission.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A further interim review of 55 parliamentary constituencies was announced by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England in December 1986. I understand that the commission's draft proposals will be published today and that, subject to the possible need to hold local inquiries and publish revised recommendations, the commission hopes to report later in the year. Once we receive its report we shall comply with our statutory duty to lay the commission's report before Parliament as soon as may be after its receipt, together with the Order in Council giving effect to its recommendations with or without modifications.

Mr. Derek Gordon

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if compensation was paid to Mr. Derek Gordon, following his complaint regarding his subsequently withdrawn confession to murder made to the west midlands police;

(2) what information he has as to action taken against the police officers responsible for obtaining a confession from Mr. Derek Gordon, while in the custody of the west midlands police at Bridge street police station, Birmingham.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that an offer of compensation has been made to Mr. Gordon and is under consideration by his legal representatives.

The Director of Public Prosecutions examined the report of the investigation into the complaints made by Mr. Gordon and formed the view that the evidence did not justify criminal proceedings against any police officer. In addition, the Police Complaints Authority has accepted the view of the assistant chief constable of the west midlands police that no disciplinary charges should be preferred against any officer with regard to these complaints.

National Security

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how frequently national security has been invoked in immigration cases as a reason for removing or deporting individuals in each year since 1973.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on assisted visits to prisoners in 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86, respectively; and what is the provisional figure for 1986-87.

Mr. Mellor: The expenditure in respect of visitors beginning their journeys from England and Wales was as follows:

	£
1983-84	637,795
1984-85	702,808
1985-86	[1]818,283
1986-87	[2]864,400

[1] Includes expenditure incurred by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1984-85 but not reimbursed by the Home Office until 1985-86.
[2] Provisional outturn.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners at Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs, Brixton, Pentonville, Holloway, Winson Green, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool prisons, respectively, spent an average of 20 hours or more per day in their cells in any recent convenient week;

(2) how many prisoners at Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubs, Brixton, Pentonville, Holloway, Winson Green, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool prisons, respectively, spent on average 23 hours a day in their cells in any recent convenient week.

Mr. Mellor: Time spent out of cells by individual prisoners (and therefore time spent in cells) is extremely difficult to measure. Prisoners leave their cells for regular regime occupational activities and the "take-up" of these activities is monitored regularly, but time spent out of cells for short-term activities is much more difficult to check. The information requested and set out in the table below has been collated locally on an ad hoc basis.

Establishment	*Week commencing*	*Number of prisoners who spent on average 20 hours a day in their cells*	*Number of prisoners who spent on average 23 hours a day in their cells*
Wandsworth	11 January 1987	[1]1,100	—
Wormwood Scrubs	18 January 1987	35	—
Brixton	18 January 1987	[2]274	—
Pentonville	4 January 1987	100	—
Holloway	11 January 1987	9	—
Birmingham	14 December 1986	330	[3]20
Leeds	4 January 1987	600	—
Manchester	4 January 1987	925	—
Liverpool	11 January 1987	[4]647	—

[1] Including 20 in hospital cellular accommodation.
[2] Including 14 in hospital cellular accommodation.
[3] Category A prisoners in hospital cellular accommodation.
[4] Including 36 in hospital cellular accommodation.

"The Secret Society"

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department gave the Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation concerning the broadcast of a programme in the British Broadcasting Corporation's series "The Secret Society", dealing with a Ministry of Defence project.

Mr. Hurd: My Department has had no contact with the BBC about this programme.

Smoking (Prosecutions)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prosecutions in England and Wales in each of the last three years brought in respect of *(a)* selling cigarettes to minors and *(b)* smoking in no-smoking parts of railways.

Mr. Mellor: I would refer the hon. Member to an answer that I gave the hon. Member for Colne Valley on 8 December at col. *82*. Information about the number of prosecutions under British Railways Board byelaws for smoking in areas where smoking is expressly prohibited by the board is not separately available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Roger Cooper

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the British journalist Roger Cooper, who has been in Evin prison, Iran, without charge for the past year.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Roger Cooper was arrested on 7 December 1985. British consular officials in Tehran have not been allowed consular access, apart from one brief occasion on 2 August 1986 when the consul was permitted to see Mr. Cooper through a glass screen.

Both we and the Swedish ambassador in Tehran have continued to press the Iranians to grant consular access as they are obliged to do as a signatory of the Vienna convention on consular relations.

We have not yet been informed of the details of any formal charges against Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Raoul Wallenberg

Mr. Burt asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the case of Mr. Raoul Wallenberg; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: None. We have, however, raised the case with the Soviet Government on a number of occasions in recent years. They have either refused to comment or referred to their 1957 note stating that Wallenberg died of a heart attack in 1947.

South Africa

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to participate in or endorse any official initiative taken by the Federal Government of West Germany in seeking to secure intervention in or making representations about the safety of mines in South Africa.

Mr. Eggar: We would be prepared to consider any specific request on this subject from the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Diplomatic Immunity

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the husband of a United States diplomat was sent home following the refusal by the United States Government to waive diplomatic immunity in respect of legal proceedings for alleged offences involving the indecent assault of a child; if he will identify the diplomat and her husband; when the alleged offences occurred; and what information he has as to whether any action is to be taken by the United States authorities against the individual concerned.

Mr. Eggar: The alleged offender was James Ingley, husband of Jane Ingley who had diplomatic immunity. According to police reports we received on 20 December 1985, he exposed himself to a girl of six and committed other acts in her presence on one occasion in October 1985. There was no rape or violence. In the absence of immunity we understand Ingley would have been charged with committing an act of gross indecency under section 1 of the Indecency with Children Act 1960.

We expressed our concern to the American embassy on 23 December and asked it to waive Ingley's immunity. It refused the request on 24 December but sent Mr. and Mrs. Ingley back to the United States on the same day. The embassy deplored the incident. It subsequently told us that Mr. Ingley had undergone medical treatment.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in respect of which relatives of foreign diplomats based in London diplomatic immunity is claimed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Vienna convention provides that members of the family of a diplomat or of a member of the administrative and technical staff forming part of his household enjoy immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state. We regard this as including the spouse, children under 18, and a few other relations, in exceptional circumstances. It is for the courts to decide on doubtful cases.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy toward relations with Governments who refuse to waive diplomatic immunity in respect of legal proceedings for alleged incidents involving violence, sexual assault, murder or other serious offences, committed by diplomats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We ask for waiver of diplomatic immunity in serious cases as defined in the White Paper on "Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges". An overseas Government may not wish to grant it as they are entitled to do under the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations. In such cases we require the prompt removal of the alleged offender.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each occasion during the last five years on which a foreign Government have refused to waive diplomatic immunity in respect of legal proceedings against one of their officials for alleged serious offences carrying a minimum prison sentence of three years; if he will specify, in each case, the rank of the official involved and the Government he represented, the alleged offence or offences involved, the date or dates on which they were alleged to have taken place and the date on which the diplomats concerned were withdrawn from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: I regret this information is not readily available in the form requested. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Bury

Q26. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Bury.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

European Council

Q117. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the preparations which have been made for the next meeting of the European Council; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The next European Council is due to be held on 29-30 June in Brussels. It will be for the Belgian presidency to make the necessary arrangements.

Peterhead

Q169. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Prime Minister if she will make an official visit to Peterhead.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Television Licences

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister which Ministers have television set facilities in their offices and other official locations; and who is responsible for the payment of the licence fee in these cases.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on Wednesday 21 January.

Information about Ministers' television set facilities is not held centrally.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister how much was paid by Government Departments to British Telecom in 1985-86 for tapping of telephones.

The Prime Minister: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on the detail of the operation of the interception arrangements.

Engagements

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

WALES

Housing

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will estimate the number of new units of housing accommodation necessary to meet anticipated demand in Wales over the next three years; and what resources will be available to meet that demand;

(2) what is the current shortfall in the provision of housing in Wales; and what are the figures for each year since 1976-77.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There continues to be a crude surplus of stock of dwellings over households in Wales but after making allowances for regional imbalance, concealed households, demolitions, rehabilitation and other factors our current estimate is that about 13,000 new units a year might be needed. The figure is based upon new research carried out for the Welsh Office by the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology. The estimate is based on a large number of assumptions and is accordingly subject to considerable uncertainty.

Gross housing capital provision in 1987-88 has been increased by 19 per cent. for the local authorities. Provision for the Housing Corporation has been increased by 22 per cent. for next year and includes resources to support private finance initiatives by housing associations as well as provision to maintain the corporation's normal programme of homes for rent. The private sector will make its own judgment on the balance between supply and demand for dwellings for owner occupation.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses in each local authority area in Wales *(a)* in the public sector and *(b)* which are owned by housing authorities need repairs costing £5,000 or more; and what have been the equivalent figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Edwards: No reliable estimate of the numbers of public sector houses requiring repairs at a cost in excess of £5,000 is currently available. The 1986 Welsh House Condition Survey will provide estimates of repair costs for houses in the public sector which will include details down to district council level.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently on the waiting lists of Welsh local authorities; and how many have been waiting *(a)* six months or less, *(b)* between six months and one year, *(c)* between one and two years, *(d)* more than two years; and what proportion each of the categories *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* represent of the total.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many private and public housing starts have been made in each local authority area in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information for the period 1979-85 is published in "Welsh Housing Statistics" (Nos 1-6), copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total amount needed to finance repairs of defective housing in Wales at current prices.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: It is impossible to estimate with any accuracy the cost of bringing the defective housing in Wales up to a satisfactory standard of repair. The Welsh House Condition Survey which the Department is currently undertaking is by far the largest survey ever carried out in Wales. The survey will provide the first detailed analysis of the state of repair of the stock at the district level and will give us valuable information to help determine future allocations to local authorities for housing expenditure.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and actual numbers of houses in each local authority area in Wales were built *(a)* before 1890, *(b)* between 1890 to 1919, *(c)* between 1919 to 1945, *(d)* between 1945 to 1955 and *(e)* after 1955.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The stock of dwellings by date of construction for each local authority in Wales was not available.

The following table shows estimates of the total housing stock for Wales at 31 December 1985, by the available age bands.

Date of construction	*Number of dwellings (thousands)*	*Percentage of all dwellings*
Pre-1891	245	21·8
1891-1918	195	17·4
1919-1944	153	13·7
1945-1970	345	30·8
Post 1970	182	16·3
TOTAL	1,120	100·0

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage change in the level of housing subsidy to local authorities in Wales between 1979 and 1986 in real and cash terms.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The level of housing subsidies paid to local authorities in Wales has reduced by 79 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1986-87 (estimated). This represents a reduction of 87 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the average housing capital expenditure per 1,000 population based on a current definition of population at capital outturn for each financial year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Gross housing capital expenditure in Wales per 1,000 population for the period 1979-80 to 1985-86 was as follows:

	£000 per 1,000 population
1979-80	54
1980-81	52
1981-82	47
1982-83	68
1983-84	96
1984-85	77
1985-86	66

The population figures used are the relevant mid-year estimates in each case.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales which local authorities in Wales have adopted the Audit Commission's suggestion in "Improving Council House Maintenance", that they draw up detailed five-year plans for the maintenance of their housing stocks.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not collected centrally. However, we welcome the thrust of this report which complements the efforts the Welsh Office is making to improve the delivery of housing services to council tenants in Wales.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the latest figures for the total housing stock in Wales, the total number and percentage of dwellings that are unfit and the number and percentage of dwellings which lack basic amenities in each housing authority area; and if he will publish the figures for each year since since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The stock of dwellings since 1979 is shown in the following table. The figures for 1981 and subsequent years are based on the results of the 1981 population census.

Year	*All tenures (thousands)*
December 1979	1,062
December 1980	1,068
December 1981	1,089
December 1982	1,096
December 1983	1,103
December 1984	1,112
December 1985	1,120

Detailed information on the condition of housing in Wales has been obtained from the 1981 Welsh House Condition Survey which provides the following estimates of the number of unfit dwellings and dwellings lacking amenities at county level. The 1986 Welsh House Condition Survey is designed to update the 1981 analysis and to provide details at district council level.

	Unfit dwellings		*Dwellings lacking amenities*	
	Number	*per cent.*	*Number*	*per cent.*
Clwyd	6,300	4·1	5,000	3·3
Dyfed	13,400	11·1	10,200	8·5
Gwent	17,000	10·6	12,800	8·0
Gwynedd	4,700	5·4	6,800	7·8
Mid Glamorgan	20,500	10·5	24,900	12·8
Powys	4,200	10·4	2,700	6·7
South Glamorgan	11,800	8·6	7,700	5·7
West Glamorgan	13,000	9·6	13,400	9·9
WALES	90,900	8·8	[1]83,600	8·1

[1] Wales total differs due to rounding.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing how many houses specifically designed for disabled people have been built in each housing authority area in Wales in each quarter since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not readily available and a reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many permanent staff in the Welsh Office have experience of housing management.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None. However, the Department has access to very substantial experience in housing management through the consultants engaged for the priority estates programme.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out at constant prices the change in subsidies and capital investment in housing in Wales between 1976-77 and 1986-87, showing the subsidy as a percentage of investment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Housing subsidies paid to local authorities in Wales have reduced by 88 per cent. in real terms between 1976-77 and 1986-87 (estimated). Gross housing capital expenditure has reduced by 38 per cent. in real terms over the same period. Housing subsidies represented 30 per cent. of gross housing capital expenditure in 1976-77 and 6 per cent. in 1986-87.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the figures for *(a)* the total number of people, *(b)* the total number of people over the age of 65 years and *(c)* the total number of children under 15 years of age and living in dwellings which are unfit; and if he will publish the figures for those in categories *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*, living in dwellings lacking one or more basic amenities in each housing authority area for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: It is not possible to estimate reliably from existing sources the numbers of people living in dwellings which are unfit or lacking amenities.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the gross domestic fixed capital formation in dwellings per head of population for Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Gross domestic fixed capital formation on local authority dwellings in Wales per head of population is estimated to total £12·17 in 1986-87.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out a table showing, for each local authority in Wales *(a)* its actual housing investment expenditure and *(b)* the total housing investment programme allocation available to it for the last full financial year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Housing capital outturn and HIP allocation 1985-86

Local authority	*Outturn £'000*	*Allocation £'000*
Aberconwy	1,644	1,308
Alyn and Deeside	3,041	2,102
Arfon	2,837	2,107
Blaenau Gwent	5,937	5,114
Brecknock	1,866	1,663
Cardiff	18,328	12,055
Carmarthen	3,814	2,898
Ceredigion	2,995	2,124
Colwyn	2,008	2,046
Cynon Valley	2,361	2,472
Delyn	1,353	1,225
Dinefwr	1,298	924
Dwyfor	609	605
Glyndwr	1,536	1,377
Islwyn	5,346	4,699
Llanelli	3,252	2,310
Lliw Valley	2,663	2,596
Meirionnydd	1,511	886
Merthyr Tydfil	2,393	2,119
Monmouth	5,140	3,336
Montgomeryshire	1,171	1,344
Neath	3,345	2,151
Newport	11,098	6,084
Ogwr	5,419	4,181
Port Talbot (Afan)	1,545	1,347
Preseli	3,011	1,870
Radnor	901	791
Rhondda	7,243	5,972
Rhuddlan	905	831
Rhymney Valley	4,876	4,750
South Pembrokeshire	2,538	1,694
Swansea	9,748	7,460
Taff-Ely	3,431	4,253
Torfaen	5,154	3,740
Vale of Glamorgan	2,369	2,664
Wrexham Maelor	4,432	3,589
Ynys Môn	2,424	2,457

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses were built *(a)* by local authorities, *(b)* by independent housing authorities and *(c)* by private companies in each local authority area in each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The required information on housing completions for the period 1979 to 1985 is published in "Welsh Housing Statistics" (Nos. 1 to 6), copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list in the *Official Report* the locations and numbers of untenanted local authority houses; and how long they have been vacant.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is given in the following table:

Vacant Dwellings: 1 April 1986

	Total vacant dwellings	*Of which vacant for more than 6 months*
Aberconwy	23	10
Alyn and Deeside	50	10
Arfon	38	0
Blaenau Gwent	93	10
Brecknock	4	0
Cardiff	234	42
Carmarthen	21	17
Ceredigion	38	0
Colwyn	29	1
Cynon Valley	87	18
Delyn	85	14
Dinefwr	0	0
Dwyfor	3	0
Glyndwr	81	0
Islwyn	94	0
Llanelli	94	0
Lliw Valley	51	0
Meirionnydd	20	8
Merthyr Tydfil	109	9
Monmouth	76	2
Montgomeryshire	48	5
Neath	60	0
Newport	197	20
Ogwr	75	0
Port Talbot (Afan)	99	26
Preseli	62	10
Radnor	10	0
Rhondda	79	0
Rhuddlan	18	0
Rhymney Valley	43	6
South Pembrokeshire	28	1
Swansea	240	10
Taff-Ely	62	0
Torfaen	115	13
Vale of Glamorgan	65	15
Wrexham Maelor	314	77

	Total vacant dwellings	Of which vacant for more than 6 months
Ynys Mon	59	5
Wales	2,804	329

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of houses completed in Wales each year since 1961 including the totals for the first three-quarters of 1986.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of completed dwellings in Wales since 1961 is given in the following table:

Number of dwellings completed in Wales: 1961-1985

	Number
1961	12,669
1962	15,110
1963	14,080
1964	18,969
1965	19,524
1966	19,360
1967	20,158
1968	19,182
1969	17,304
1970	15,473
1971	15,101
1972	14,770
1973	14,334
1974	11,811
1975	17,236
1976	15,234
1977	14,414
1978	12,638
1979	11,265
1980	10,487
1981	9,106
1982	7,926
1983	7,812
1984	9,187
1985	8,213

Number of dwellings completed in Wales in the first three- quarters of 1986

	Number
January-March 1986	1,898
April-June 1986	2,264
July-September 1986	2,090

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the notional housing revenue account for Wales for the current financial year and the estimates made in respect of the next financial year; and if he will list the assumptions contained therein.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Based on the latest returns made by local authorities to the Welsh Office, the estimated housing revenue account for Wales for the current year is set out in the following table. Similar information is not available at this stage for 1987-88; the relevant local authority returns will not be available until the early autumn.

Housing Revenue Account: 1986-87 Estimate

	£ million
Expenditure	
Supervision and management	42
Repairs and maintenance	88
Interest payments	131
Debt repayments	26
Capital met from revenue	4
Other expenditure	1
Change in balances	−7
Total expenditure	285
Income	
Gross rent	228
Interest on mortgages	14
Interest on capital receipts	16
Rate fund contribution:	
Rate rebate administration	2
Other rents and income	13
Total income	273
Balancing and Funding items	
Deficit	12
Financed by	
Exchequer subsidy	10
Voluntary rate fund contributions	3
Transfers to the general rate fund	−1

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the amounts of exchequer housing subsidies and non-statutory rate fund contributions in each year since 1979-80 both in outturn terms and at 1986-87 prices for each local authority in Wales and in total for Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Based on returns made by local authorities to the Welsh Office, the information as estimated in the following tables.

The figures in the table showing rate fund contributions exclude statutory contributions made in respect of rent rebates.

The amounts shown at 1986-87 prices have been derived by the application of the GDP market price deflators.

Central Government Subsidy Entitlement

£000

	1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Aberconwy	357	595	494	694	0	0	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	701	1,168	738	1,037	139	178	0	0
Arfon	773	1,288	909	1,277	205	262	0	0
Blaenau Gwent	3,432	5,718	4,053	5,692	2,881	3,684	1,662	1,981
Brecknock	1,351	2,251	1,387	1,948	786	1,005	159	190
Cardiff	4,202	7,001	5,498	7,722	2,226	2,847	0	0
Carmarthen	1,005	1,674	1,164	1,635	804	1,028	515	614
Ceredigion	1,114	1,856	1,181	1,659	850	1,087	387	461
Colwyn	583	971	752	1,056	343	439	0	0

	1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Cynon Valley	1,440	2,399	1,625	2,282	901	1,152	320	381
Delyn	1,112	1,853	1,211	1,701	430	550	0	0
Dinefwr	516	860	655	920	300	384	0	0
Dwyfor	155	258	217	305	3	4	0	0
Glyndwr	560	933	703	987	294	376	0	0
Islwyn	1,644	2,739	1,926	2,705	894	1,143	0	0
Llanelli	2,104	3,505	2,282	3,205	1,215	1,554	0	0
Lliw Valley	2,007	3,334	2,009	2,822	1,283	1,641	400	477
Meirionnydd	683	1,138	796	1,118	475	607	131	157
Merthyr Tydfil	2,410	4,015	2,633	3,698	1,544	1,974	654	780
Monmouth	1,126	1,876	1,209	1,698	473	605	0	0
Montgomeryshire	793	1,321	921	1,294	270	345	0	0
Neath	1,441	2,401	1,674	2,351	653	835	0	0
Newport	4,350	7,247	5,446	7,649	3,732	4,772	2,284	2,724
Ogwr	3,169	5,280	3,610	5,070	1,983	2,536	464	553
Port Talbot	858	1,429	797	1,119	0	0	0	0
Preseli	1,714	2,856	1,476	2,073	615	786	0	0
Radnor	373	621	511	718	302	386	125	149
Rhondda	1,415	2,357	1,558	2,188	1,189	1,520	645	769
Rhuddlan	230	383	308	433	0	0	0	0
Rhymney Valley	3,642	6,068	4,033	5,664	2,564	3,279	1,129	1,346
South Pembroke	1,146	1,909	1,141	1,603	607	776	14	17
Swansea	2,993	4,987	3,225	4,529	866	1,107	0	0
Taff Ely	1,835	3,057	2,029	2,850	937	1,198	0	0
Torfaen	2,458	4,095	2,967	4,167	1,539	1,968	568	677
Vale of Glamorgan	1,978	3,295	2,010	2,823	1,166	1,491	200	238
Wrexham Maelor	1,736	2,892	2,064	2,899	0	0	0	0
Ynys Mon	1,274	2,123	1,607	2,257	855	1,093	0	0
TOTAL	58,680	97,765	66,819	93,846	33,324	42,615	9,657	11,514

£000

	1983-84		1984-85		1985-86		1986-87	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Aberconwy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arfon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Blaenau Gwent	1,730	1,975	1,466	1,604	1,522	1,568	1,582	1,582
Brecknock	160	183	81	88	53	55	44	44
Cardiff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carmarthen	530	605	659	721	811	836	831	831
Ceredigion	395	451	576	630	597	615	635	635
Colwyn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cynon Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Delyn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dinefwr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dwyfor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glyndwr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Llanelli	0	0	0	0	127	131	193	193
Lliw Valley	435	496	402	440	624	643	741	741
Meirionnydd	33	38	0	0	40	41	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	328	374	152	167	276	284	270	270
Monmouth	0	0	122	134	NK	NK	NK	NK
Montgomeryshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neath	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newport	2,182	2,490	1,955	2,140	3,267	3,365	2,395	2,395
Ogwr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Port Talbot	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preseli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radnor	134	153	189	207	191	197	221	221
Rhondda	542	619	544	595	593	611	500	500
Rhuddlan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rhymney Valley	519	592	454	497	878	905	546	546
South Pembroke	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swansea	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taff Ely	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Torfaen	748	854	673	737	845	870	1,539	1,539
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wrexham Maelor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ynys Mon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	7,735	8,829	7,275	7,960	9,825	10,120	9,496	9,496

Rate fund contributions to the HRA

£000

	1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Aberconwy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	19	32	80	112	19	24	28	33
Arfon	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	30
Blaenau Gwent	333	555	1,156	1,624	1,187	1,518	828	987
Brecknock	120	200	360	506	372	476	212	253
Cardiff	235	392	1,453	2,041	484	619	760	906
Carmarthen	213	355	226	317	148	187	147	176
Ceredigion	160	267	200	281	175	224	125	149
Colwyn	11	18	35	49	44	56	100	119
Cynon Valley	384	640	344	483	743	950	961	1,146
Delyn	301	501	257	361	0	0	0	0
Dinefwr	60	100	199	279	336	430	39	46
Dwyfor	32	53	51	72	60	77	0	0
Glyndwr	127	212	155	218	168	215	0	0
Islwyn	11	18	88	124	300	384	291	348
Llanelli	0	0	87	122	0	0	0	0
Lliw Valley	44	73	208	292	0	0	0	0
Meirionnydd	125	208	26	37	77	98	14	16
Merthyr Tydfil	999	1,664	819	1,150	377	482	539	643
Monmouth	264	440	169	237	202	258	57	68
Montgomeryshire	123	205	241	338	0	0	0	0
Neath	284	473	284	399	335	428	126	150
Newport	0	0	149	209	203	260	0	0
Ogwr	54	90	429	603	532	680	431	514
Port Talbot	553	921	293	412	102	130	0	0
Preseli	422	703	401	563	147	188	2	2
Radnor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rhondda	499	831	486	683	908	1,161	1,207	1,439
Rhuddlan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Rhymney Valley	1,119	1,864	1,414	1,986	966	1,235	1,279	1,525
South Pembroke	97	162	107	150	169	216	254	303
Swansea	747	1,245	531	746	933	1,193	262	313
Taff Ely	1,001	1,668	1,034	1,452	839	1,073	779	928
Torfaen	768	1,280	507	712	520	665	1,298	1,548
Vale of Glam	124	207	315	442	214	274	195	232
Wrexham Maelor	558	930	567	796	393	503	778	927
Ynys Mon	415	691	555	779	217	278	368	439
Total	10,202	16,997	13,226	18,576	11,168	14,282	11,104	13,241

	1983-84		1984-85		1985-86		1986-87	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Aberconwy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	12	14	20	21	25	26	25	25
Arfon	25	29	11	12	29	30	37	37
Blaenau Gwent	139	159	35	39	0	0	0	0
Brecknock	124	142	77	84	156	160	137	137
Cardiff	750	856	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carmarthen	148	169	152	167	153	157	150	150
Ceredigion	200	228	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colwyn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cynon Valley	331	378	159	175	256	264	0	0
Delyn	0	0	0	0	446	459	477	477
Dinefwr	0	0	6	7	12	13	91	91
Dwyfor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glyndwr	40	45	0	0	0	0	0	0
Islwyn	275	314	0	0	75	77	100	100
Llanelli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lliw Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meirionnydd	83	95	35	38	0	0	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	624	712	140	153	290	298	102	102
Monmouth	61	70	301	330	nk	nk	nk	nk
Montgomeryshire	60	69	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neath	60	68	60	65	0	0	0	0
Newport	182	208	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ogwr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Port Talbot	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preseli	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Radnor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rhondda	1,286	1,468	1,243	1,360	1,402	1,444	907	907

	1983-84		1984-85		1985-86		1986-87	
	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices	Outturn prices	1986-87 prices
Rhuddlan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rhymney Valley	0	0	336	367	0	0	0	0
South Pembroke	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swansea	780	891	550	602	105	108	274	274
Taff Ely	1,001	300	328	0	0	0	0	
Torfaen	435	497	438	479	186	191	160	160
Vale of Glam	178	203	200	219	87	90	0	0
Wrexham Maelor	914	1,043	576	630	272	280	320	320
Ynys Mon	324	370	101	110	0	0	215	215
Total	7,336	8,374	4,742	5,189	3,495	3,600	2,998	2,998

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the value of Exchequer housing subsidies and rate fund contributions per local authority dwelling in Wales for each year from 1978-79 to 1986-87 in outturn terms and at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Based on returns made by local authorities to the Welsh Office, the information is estimated to be as follows:

	Central Government Subsidy Entitlement		£ per annum per dwelling Rate Fund Contributions[1]	
	Outturn Prices	1986-87 Prices	Outturn Prices	1986-87 Prices
1978-79	174	339	20	39
1979-80	206	343	36	60
1980-81	233	327	46	65
1981-82	118	151	39	50
1982-83	36	43	41	49
1983-84	27	31	28	32
1984-85	30	33	19	21
1985-86	40	41	14	14
1986-87	38	38	12	12

[1] Excluding statutory contributions in respect of rent rebates.

The amounts shown at 1986-87 prices have been derived by the application of the GDP market price deflators.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give an estimate of how many more dwellings than households there are in Wales at present; and what are the figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The difference between the number of dwellings and the number of households in Wales in each year since 1979 is shown in the following table:

Year	Number of dwellings minus number of households ('000s)
1979	65
1980	61
1981	77
1982	80
1983	83
1984	84
1985	85

Homelessness

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people were accepted as homeless by each local authority in Wales in 1986; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979;

(2) how many homeless persons were housed by each of the Welsh housing authorities in Wales in each year since 1979; and what proportion of those accepted as homeless in each area they represent.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not immediately available. I will reply as soon as possible.

Education Act 1980

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those voluntary projects, organisations and bodies he has funded in Wales since 1979 along with the amount allocated, other than those which he has financed under section 21 of the Education Act 1980, listing those Welsh language projects, organisations and bodies separately.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Higher Education

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many students are in full-time higher education in Wales at present; and what are the figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The available information on the numbers of full-time and sandwich students at the University of Wales and those on advanced further education at other further education establishments in Wales are as follows:

Year	Number
1979-80	27,161
1980-81	28,204
1981-82	28,851
1982-83	29,069
1983-84	29,582
1984-85	30,482
1985-86	31,855

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the proportion of 18 to 19-year-olds entering full-time higher education in Wales; and what are the figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on the number of 18 and 19-year-old initial entrants from Wales to higher education is not readily available. However, information on the number of 18 and 19-year-olds in Wales who are full-time and sandwich students at the University of Wales or on full-time and sandwich courses at other further education establishments in Wales is shown in the following table:

Academic Year	Full-time and sandwich students, aged 18 and 19, on higher education courses in Wales	As percentage of estimated total of 18 and 19-year-old population in Wales
1979-80	7,870	9·2
1980-81	8,442	9·5
1981-82	8,461	9·2
1982-83	8,994	9·6
1983-84	9,192	9·4
1984-85	9,699	10·3
1985-86	9,878	10·9

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether his Department has carried out any investigation into the change in pupil achievement following the Government's increased support for the assisted places scheme in Wales;

(2) what assessment his Department has carried out into the effects of its policy of increased support of assisted pupils on the education system in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Changes in individual pupils' achievements cannot be measured directly. However, the Government are satisfied that the broadening of educational opportunities provided by the scheme has been wholly beneficial.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many pupils from each local education authority area in Wales who have been awarded assisted places at independent schools have dropped out of the scheme in each year since its inception.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not available.

Arts (Grant)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in the total grant by the Welsh local authorities to the arts between 1979 and 1986 in real and in cash terms.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information about grants by local authorities to the arts is collected and published by CIPFA in "Leisure and Recreation Statistics", (1986/87 columns 171 to 183). This publication, together with those of previous years, is held in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the projected change in his Department's total grant to the arts between 1986-87 and 1987-88 in real terms and in cash terms.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The central Government element of public expenditure provision for arts and libraries within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales is planned to rise from £11·6 million in 1986-87 to £16·6 million in 1987-88. The comparable figures at 1985-86 prices are £11·3 million and £15·5 million respectively.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish an analysis of the expenditure shown in table 3.17 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90", Cmnd. 56 II, on a similar basis to tables 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 of the same publication.

Mr. Edwards: The information is set out in the following tables. In all the tables the totals have been derived from unrounded figures and thus the components may not always add exactly to the totals shown.

Table 16.1 Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and Other EC Expenditure									
Market Support	12	9	19	23	25	26	30		
Projects Assisted by EC	—	1	—	1	1	1	1		
Total IBAP and other EC expenditure	12	9	20	24	26	27	31		
Domestic Agriculture, Fisheries and Food									
National Market Support	—	—	—	2	2	2	2		
Structural Measures for Agriculture	41	52	58	52	58	49	48		
Animal Health	—	—	—	—	1	—	—		
Other Agricultural and Food Services	—	—	—	—	—	1	—		
Support for the Fishing Industry	1	1	—	1	—	1	1		
Total Domestic Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	42	53	59	55	61	53	51		
TOTAL AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD	54	62	79	79	86	81	82	80	80

Programmes 16.2 and 16.3 Industry, Trade and Employment

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Industry—Central Government									
Regional and general industrial support	5	11	16	53	107	122	77		
Other Public Corporations (WDA and DBRW)									
Voted in Estimates	80	62	46	44	39	44	50		
Other	5	3	2	6	5	4	7		
Total Other Public Corporations	86	65	53	51	44	48	56		
TOTAL INDUSTRY	90	76	70	104	151	169	133		
Employment—Central Government									
Careers service grant	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Tourism	5	5	5	6	7	8	8		
Total Central Government	6	6	6	7	8	9	9		
Local Authorities (Careers Service)									
Relevant Current Expenditure	2	2	3	3	3	4	4		
Non Relevant Current Expenditure	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Total Local Authorities	3	3	4	4	4	5	5		
Total Employment	9	9	10	11	12	14	14		
TOTAL INDUSTRY, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT	99	85	79	114	163	182	147	140	140

Programme 16.4 Roads and Transport

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Central Government									
National roads system									
Current (1)	12	9	12	12	14	15	14	—	—
Capital (2)	95	110	136	93	85	91	110	—	—
Freight facilities and other grants	—	—	1	—	1	1	1	—	—
Total Central Government	108	119	149	105	100	107	125	140	140
Local Authorities									
Relevant current spending									
Roads	72	69	74	74	74	78	85	—	—
Car parks (net of receipts)	—	—	−1	−1	−1	−1	−2	—	—
Revenue support for public transport	4	3	4	4	5	12	13	—	—
Concessionary fares	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	—	—
Professional and technical services including Road Safety	16	10	15	16	17	18	18	—	—
Total relevant current spending	97	89	97	98	102	114	122	130	130
Local Authority Capital									
Roads	48	66	58	55	66	58	65	—	—
Car parks	1	1	3	2	2	2	2	—	—
Public transport	2	4	3	2	2	1	2	—	—
Total Local Authority Capital	51	71	64	59	70	61	69	70	70
Total Local Authorities	148	159	161	158	171	175	191	200	200
Public Corporations:									
National Bus Company EFL	5	6	7	7	7	—	—	—	—
Other Public Corporations	2	2	1	3	1	3	3	—	—

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Total Public Corporations	7	9	8	9	8	3	3	—	—
Total Roads and Transport	263	287	317	272	279	285	319	330	340

Programme 16.5 Housing

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Gross capital expenditure									
Public sector provision									
Renovation of local authority New Town stock	25	48	50	44	51	58	58		
New provision for rent:									
by local authorities	44	42	47	35	26	29	24		
by housing associations (including low cost home ownership)	33	46	49	43	43	49	59		
by New Towns	2	5	3	4	3	1	0		
Total public sector provision	104	141	149	126	123	137	141		
Gross capital expenditure									
Support to private sector									
Home ownership:									
Local authority and New Town Homeloan and option mortgage schemes	6	8	9	6	3	2	2		
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Renovation and clearance	21	43	110	85	60	80	98		
Total support to private sector	27	51	119	91	63	82	100		
Gross capital expenditure	131	192	268	217	186	219	241	230	240
Capital receipts	−69	−98	−92	−98	−81	−86	−98	−110	−110
Net capital expenditure	62	94	176	119	105	133	143	130	130
Current expenditure									
Subsidies to revenue deficit on local authority, New Town and housing association housing for rent	53	25	11	12	12	15	12		
Housing Associations and central government: current	1	1	1	1	2	3	3		
Local authority administration	5	5	7	7	7	8	8		
Total current expenditure	59	31	19	20	21	26	23	20	20
Total housing	121	125	195	139	126	159	166	150	150

Programme 16.6 Other Environmental Services

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Local environmental services (excluding urban programme)									
Current expenditure	153	166	168	175	180	191	196		
Capital expenditure	52	47	56	48	59	67	49		
Local authority rate collection (current expenditure)	6	8	7	8	8	8	9		
Records and registration of births, deaths and marriages (current expenditure)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Urban programme	8	18	15	21	23	27	32		
Derelict land reclamation	—	10	11	7	10	12	12		
Historic buildings, ancient monuments	2	2	2	3	4	5	5		
Grants to environmental bodies	3	3	4	4	4	5	6		
Water research and other water services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Public corporations									
Urban Development Corporations	—	—	—	—	—	—	11		
New Towns	4	2	2	1	−11	2	—	—	—
Total—other environmental services	230	258	268	267	279	317	323	330	340
Welsh Water Authority EFL	24	23	19	24	21	17	13	10	10

Programme 16.7 Education

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Central Government									
Schools									
Primary, Secondary and other Capital	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	—	—
Other Current	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Higher and Further Education									
Voluntary Current	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	—	—
Adult Education (including awards)	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	—	—
Miscellaneous Education									
Services and Research	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Youth Services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Other Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Services	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Support for Welsh Language	—	1	1	1	1	2	2	—	—
Total voted expenditure	6	6	7	8	9	10	12	10	10
Local Authorities									
Relevant current spending—Schools									
Nursery Schools	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	—	—
Primary Schools	174	182	190	192	202	224	240	—	—
Secondary Schools	204	218	232	239	246	275	293	—	—
Special schools	16	18	20	22	20	24	27	—	—
Other (including Supporting Services)	5	6	5	6	6	5	7	—	—
Transport	20	21	23	23	22	25	27	—	—
Meals and milk	24	27	28	29	29	30	29	—	—
Further Education									
FE	70	80	85	90	94	102	106	—	—
Awards to Students	7	7	8	9	9	9	10	—	—
Miscellaneous Education									
Services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Youth Services	4	5	6	6	7	7	7	—	—
Other Education Services	5	5	5	4	5	6	5	—	—
Administration	27	29	31	32	33	37	38	—	—
Total relevant current spending	558	601	636	655	676	748	793	830	860
Local Authority Capital	30	34	35	34	26	29	41	40	40
Total Local Authorities	588	635	671	689	702	777	834	880	900
Total Education	594	641	679	697	711	787	846	890	910

Programme 16.8 Arts and Libraries

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Central Government									
National Library of Wales Current	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	—	—
Capital	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	—
National Museum of Wales Current	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	—	—
Capital	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	—	—
Total Central Government	9	9	9	10	11	12	17	20	20
Local Authorities									
Relevant Current Spending									

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 estimated outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Libraries	13	15	15	16	16	17	18	—	—
Museums and Galleries	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	—	—
Total Relevant Current Spending	14	16	17	18	18	19	20	20	20
Local Authority Capital									
Libraries	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Museums and Galleries	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	—	—
Total Local Authority Capital	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	—	—
Total Local Authorities	15	17	19	19	20	21	21	20	20
Total Libraries, Museums and Arts	24	26	28	29	31	33	38	40	40

Programme 16.9 Health and Personal Social Services

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Health Services									
Hospital and Community Health Services									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	479	517	544	585	625	679	730	—	—
—Charges	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	—	—
—Net	478	516	543	583	623	677	728	—	—
Capital expenditure									
—Gross	41	47	50	53	55	49	55	—	—
—Charges	—	2	1	2	2	3	3	—	—
—Net	47	45	49	51	53	46	52	—	—
Family Practioner Services									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	162	188	202	221	233	252	276	—	—
—Charges	13	15	17	18	17	20	21	—	—
—Net	149	173	185	203	216	232	255	—	—
Capital expenditure (net)	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Central Health and Miscellaneous Services									
Current expenditure	15	17	20	24	27	34	38	—	—
Capital expenditure	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—
Total National Health Finance									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	656	722	766	830	885	965	1,044	—	—
—Net	642	706	748	810	866	943	1,021	—	—
Capital expenditure									
—Gross	41	47	50	54	57	51	55	—	—
—Net	41	45	49	52	55	48	52	—	—
Personal Social Services Central Government Services									
Current expenditure	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Local Authority Services									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	115	125	137	140	146	158	168	—	—
—Charges	21	22	24	23	24	26	28	—	—
—Net	94	103	113	117	122	132	140	—	—
Capital expenditure									
—Gross	5	6	6	7	5	6	7	—	—
—Charges	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	—	—
—Net	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	—	—
Total Personal Social Services									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	115	125	138	141	147	159	169	—	—
—Net	94	103	114	118	122	133	141	—	—
Capital expenditure									
—Gross	5	6	6	7	5	6	7	—	—
—Net	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	—	—

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 plans	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans
Total Health and Personal Social Services									
Current expenditure									
—Gross	771	847	904	971	1,031	1,124	1,213	—	—
—Charges	35	38	42	43	43	48	51	—	—
—Net	736	809	862	988	988	1,076	1,162	—	—
Capital expenditure									
—Gross	46	53	56	61	62	57	62	—	—
—Charges	—	3	2	3	2	3	4	—	—
—Net	46	50	54	58	60	54	58	—	—
Total Health and Personal Social Services Current and Capital Net	782	859	916	986	1,048	1,130	1,220	1,270	1,320

TRANSPORT

Remould Tyres

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the effectiveness of the voluntary procedure for recalling defective remould tyres, in the light of the case of Messrs. Arvoland of Cambridge, now in receivership; if he has any proposals for the introduction of a mandatory system for warning the user of the potential dangers of such tyres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am satisfied with the general operation of the voluntary code of practice for tyre recalls, and with its application in the case of Arvoland Ltd. until this firm went into receivership. These arrangements provide for departmental publicity when necessary. I see no need for a mandatory system of recall.

Crash Barriers

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage of motorways in the north-west region have central reservation crash barriers; and what is the national percentage;

(2) what percentage of dual carriage motorways in the north-west region have central reservation crash barriers; and what is the national percentage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Approximately 99 per cent. of motorways in the north-west region have central reserve safety fencing. The figure for all motorways in England is about 98 per cent. The only section of motorway in the north-west region without such fencing is a 4 km section of M6 motorway near Shap (Cumbria) where the width of the central reserve is greater than 10 m.

The percentage of all-purpose dual carriageway trunk roads with central reserve safety fencing in the north-west region is similar to the national figure of 10 per cent.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to provide dual carriageway trunk roads in the north-west region with central reservation crash barriers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Further to my announcement in the *Official Report*, 17 December 1986, at column 537, I am reviewing the traffic flows on the dual carriageway trunk roads in the north-west region to establish where central reserve safety fencing should be installed.

A13 (Basildon)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made concerning road improvements to that part of the A13 which goes through Basildon.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This part of the A13 is not a national road. Its improvement is the responsibility of Essex county council.

Rose and Crown, Fosdyke

Sir Richard Body asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will state the date when he asked the district valuer, Boston, to value the property known as the Rose and Crown, Fosdyke, Lincolnshire, preparatory to acquiring it to enable the new bridge at Fosdyke to be built;

(2) Whether he will give the date when he received a suggested price for the purchase of the property known as the Rose and Crown, Fosdyke, Lincolnshire, from either the owner or the owner's agent.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It was in September 1985 that the Department offered to acquire the whole property, that is, not merely that part judged necessary for the works and already proposed for compulsory purchase. The district valuer was unable to agree a valuation with the owner's agent when he held informal discussion with him on 26 November. He reported on the difference to the Department.

In August 1986 the main compulsory purchase order associated with the scheme was confirmed. This included only a small strip of the property. Subsequently it was decided that the works were likely to cause collapse of or damage to the buildings. Accordingly, the Department published in October 1986 a supplementary draft compulsory purchase order in respect of the property. The cost to the Department of the order and associated public inquiry into objection to it is assessed at about £700. We are prepared to limit purchase to the additional land required for the works and to the right to demolish the building, provided that appropriate terms can be reached. A dispute on compensation can be referred to the Lands Tribunal.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for transport what representations he has received regarding further

civilian operation of Chinook helicopters, following the accident at Sumburgh, Shetland on 6 November 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have received a number of representations following the tragic accident to the British International Helicopters' Chinook near Sumburgh on 6 November 1986. As all aspects of civil aviation safety are the statutory responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority, I have passed the representations to the authority for consideration.

A34

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is aware of any insuperable engineering difficulties to building underpasses under the roundabouts on the A34 by Newbury; and what estimate has been made of their likely cost.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Early studies included consideration of a continuous underpass on the A34 by Newbury. Because of poor ground conditions, the River Kennet and the high water table, and nearby development, the cost was estimated then to be in excess of £30 million. A full central route scheme, with a tunnel, was then estimated to be about three times more expensive than a bypass and was not therefore pursued.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated volume of traffic using the A34 daily between the junction 13 turn-off from the M4 to the Sandleford roundabout; what is the estimated maximum number of vehicles this stretch of road is designed to carry; and what assessment has been made of the effect on traffic volumes of making the A34 by Newbury into a three-lane highway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Traffic flows on the sections of A34 between the M4 and the Pinchington Lane roundabout in 1983 were in the range 17,000-32,000 vehicles per 12-hour average weekday. The range is forecast to rise to 22,000-52,000 by 2006, without a bypass.

The capacity of the road is determined by the rate at which traffic can pass through the roundabouts. The maximum flow approaching the Robin Hood roundabout from the south has been measured at 2,500 vehicles per hour with a long queue. This compares with an operating level of at least 4,800 for one carriageway of a dual three-lane urban road without junctions.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been carried out by his Department into replacing the roundabout on the A34 by the Robin Hood public house to enable north-south traffic to be separated from traffic flowing into and out of Newbury; if he will give costings for the work; and what consideration has been given to improving traffic flow at the other roundabout on the Newbury stretch of the road.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The possibility of separating north-south A34 traffic was considered prior to public consultation. An option passing under the Robin Hood roundabout, bypassing the central roundabout and joining a modified southern roundabout, was rejected because of traffic problems during construction, the effect on commercial interests and the substantially higher cost estimated at the time as more than £20 million.

Railways (Electrification)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with British Rail on the proposed London-Edinburgh-Linlithgow-Falkirk-Glasgow and London-Edinburgh-Fauldhouse-Glasgow electrified lines.

Mr. David Mitchell: As I told the hon. Member on 12 December, BR is studying the possibility of electrification between Edinburgh and Glasgow, but I have received no proposals. British Rail is well aware of the need to examine thoroughly all the potential implications.

EC (Investment Projects)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what major investment projects his Department has identified for possible support from European Community funds.

Mr. Moore: The Department has submitted to the European Commission details of a number of road and rail projects, as well as some port and airport projects, in the context of the Community's programme of support for transport infrastructure projects. Various transport projects in, or directly serving, assisted areas have also been submitted for support from the European regional development fund. The Government continually seek eligible transport projects with a view to putting them forward for ERDF assistance.

Foreigners (Driving Restrictions)

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what are the licence requirements of foreigners who drive on United Kingdom roads during holidays taken in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In common with international practice, visitors to this country who hold a valid foreign domestic driving licence or international driving permit may drive any vehicle covered by that document for a maximum period of 12 months.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any age restrictions on foreign nationals visiting the United Kingdom for holidays driving on United Kingdom roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: There is a requirement that visitors driving in this country must have reached the appropriate minimum age specified for GB licence holders for driving the vehicles the foreign licence or permit covers the person to drive, except in the case of certain heavy motor vehicles.

Helicopter Accident, Sumburgh

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made with the investigation and inquiries into the accident involving a Boeing Vertol 234 (Chinook) helicopter at Sumburgh, Shetland on 6 November 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The investigation of aircraft accidents is the responsibility of the Department's chief inspector of accidents, who has an independent position in carrying out his investigations, which, by law, have to

be held in private. It is thus not appropriate for me to make statements about the evidence being gathered and considered during an investigation.

However, the chief inspector issued a special bulletin on 13 November which said that the accident resulted from a catastrophic fatigue of a gear in the forward rotor gearbox. Information passed by the accidents investigation branch to the Civil Aviation Authority has enabled it, acting with the United States Federal Aviation Administration and the aircraft's manufacturer, to take appropriate airworthiness action. Meanwhile, the investigation into the precise mechanism of the gear failure continues and a report will be published in the usual way once the investigation is complete.

Road Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorists were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in driving accidents in (i) England and (ii) the county of Avon in each of the following years: 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 respectively.

Mr. Peter Bottomley [*pursuant to his reply*, of 19 January 1987, c. *388*]: The number of drivers and passengers of all motor vehicles killed and injured in England and the county of Avon for the years 1982 to 1985 are given in the tables. We do not yet have the 1986 figures.

Table 1.—Drivers and passengers of all motor vehicles killed and injured in England: 1982 to 1985

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Drivers/Riders:				
Killed	2,133	1,847	1,916	1,768
Injured	135,985	121,269	128,864	126,539
Total	138,118	123,116	130,780	128,307
Passengers:				
Killed	998	850	933	811
Injured	73,184	650,02	69,634	70,413
Total	74,182	65,852	70,567	71,224
All Ocupants:				
Killed	3,131	2,697	2,849	2,579
Injured	209,169	186,271	198,498	196,952
Total	212,300	188,968	201,347	199,531

Table 2.—Drivers and passengers of all motor vehicles killed and injured in Avon: 1982 to 1985

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Drivers/Riders:				
Killed	38	44	35	32
Injured	2,494	2,238	2,175	2,152
Total	2,532	2,282	2,210	2,184
Passengers:				
Killed	21	25	17	23
Injured	1,214	997	950	975
Total	1,235	1,022	967	998
All Ocupants:				
Killed	59	69	52	55
Injured	3,708	3,235	3,125	3,127
Total	3,767	3,304	3,177	3,182

ENVIRONMENT

Countryside (Planning Controls)

56. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will seek to extend planning controls over the countryside.

Mr. Waldegrave: As we affirmed in chapter 5 of "Building Businesses . . . Not barriers" (Cmnd. 9794), we will continue to bring forward measures to ensure that the planning system is effective where careful control of development is warranted. This principle was reflected in the extension last November to all national parks of controls over the design, external appearance and siting of farm and forestry buildings and roads. My right hon. Friend also announced last November proposals for additional planning control over new livestock buildings near residential and other property.

Listed Walls

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he uses in deciding whether or not to allow planning consent to alter the structure of listed walls.

Mr. Waldegrave: Listed building consent is required if works involve the demolition, alteration or extension of a listed building in a manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

Each application is considered on its own merits. General guidance on the criteria to be taken into account when applications are being considered may be found in paragraph 63 of DOE Circular 23/77, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations govern the building of houses against listed walls.

Mr. Waldegrave: Section 28 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 requires local planning authorities to give publicity to any planning applications which would affect the setting of a listed building. Any representations received have to be taken into account by the local planning authority when it is deciding the application. General guidance to local planning authorities on the criteria to be followed when considering applications is set out in paragraphs 25-26 of DOE Circular 23/77, a copy of which is in the Library.

Greenpeace (Correspondence)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to respond to letters despatched to his office by Greenpeace *(a)* dated 8 August 1986 on the unified pollution inspectorate, and *(b)* dated 31 October 1986 on the international conference on protection of the North sea.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have written to the hon. Member.

Fisheries (Nuclear Contamination)

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the fishing industry both in the United Kingdom and in

Europe expressing concern over the economic impact on that industry of the contamination of the sea by Sellafield and Dounreay.

Mr. Waldegrave: No such representations have been received.

Park Vista, Greenwich

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any information as to whether the Nature Conservancy Council is considering the designation of the walled garden in Park Vista, Greenwich as a site of special scientific interest.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised that the Nature Conservancy Council has no plans to notify the walled garden at Park Vista, Greenwich as an SSSI.

EEC Directives

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made since 19 June 1984 on the draft European Community directive on the harmonisation of architectural qualifications; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: EC Directive 85/384/EEC on the mutual recognition of formal qualifications in architecture was adopted in June 1985. The United Kingdom was fomerly notified of this on 5 August 1985. Implementation is expected by August this year.

To achieve this, an Order in Council will be put before Parliament under the powers conferred by section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. It will amend the Architects (Registration) Act 1931 so that the order can come into force by 5 August 1987. Officials have worked closely with the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom and have consulted widely in the preparation of the order.

The Government welcome the mutual recognition of qualifications. I see this particular directive as an opportunity for architects to extend their activities into other member states while safeguarding our own professional standards in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on European Community Council draft directive (78) 449 on construction products since 4 June 1984; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Work on the draft directive (78) 449 has not proceeded following the European Communities Council resolution of 7 May 1985 on a new approach to technical harmonisation of standards and the European Commission's White Paper "Completing the Internal Market" published in June, 1985. In its place the Commission has drafted in consultation with member states a single directive on construction products, which differs from (78) 449 in containing essential requirements, expressed only in general terms with a minimum of supporting provisions. This draft is expected to be sent by the Commission to the Council shortly.

Assured Tenancy Scheme

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those organisations responding to his Department's consultation paper on the minimum level of expenditure to be prescribed under the extended provisions of the assured tenancy scheme introduced under the Housing and Planning Act 1986; and which of these organisations *(a)* said they were content with his Department's proposals for the minimum prescribed expenditure, *(b)* sought a higher amount, *(c)* sought a lower amount and *(d)* argued that there should be no prescribed minimum.

Mr. John Patten: The following organisations replied to the consultation paper:

Abbey HA Ltd.
Association of County Councils.
Association of District Councils.
Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Barratt Developments plc.
Bolwell and Hayward.
The Bradford Property Trust plc.
British Property Federation.
Brookhouse Estates Ltd.
Brunswick Manor Ltd.—on behalf of associated bodies.

Carlton (Hull) Ltd.
Chartered Institute of Building.

Eaton Square Properties Ltd.
The Elim Trust Corporation.
English Heritage.
Escadale Properties Ltd.

Fairlake Housing Association Ltd.
Federation of Private Residents' Associations.
Forebury Estates Ltd.

Greenwood Homes Ltd.
Griffon Land and Estates Ltd.
Grimwood Properties Ltd.

Hampton Housing Association Ltd.
House-Builders' Federation.
Housing Corporation.

IBC (Civil Engineering, Wakefield) Ltd.
Ideal Holdings plc—on behalf of associated bodies.
Institute of Housing.

Kenold (Canterbury)—on behalf of associated bodies.
Kensington Housing Association Ltd.
Kingdomwide Ltd.—on behalf of associated bodies.

Lancaster Court (Hove) Ltd.
Leeds Residential Property Association.
London Boroughs Association.
Longfeld Investment Company Ltd.

National Federation of Housing Co-operatives.
National Home Improvement Council.
Nationwide Housing Trust Ltd.
Norwich Union Life Insurance Society.

Orbit Housing Society Ltd.

Pattinsons Estates Ltd.—on behalf of associated bodies.
Prudential Pensions Ltd.—on behalf of associated bodies.

Regent Housing Society Ltd.
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

Shelter.
Small Landlords' Association.
The Street Group of Companies—on behalf of associated bodies.

Topcliff Properties Ltd.

The United Women's Housing Association Ltd.

Voluntary and Christian Service Housing Association (1982) Ltd.

Welsh Counties Committee.

A. C. Williamson & Son.

W. S. J. Holdings Ltd.

Yelcon Ltd.

Only a limited number of respondents have expressly given consent for their views to be made public. I can, however, summarise the responses as follows:

Summary of opinions on the prescribed amount

Category of respondent	*Content with proposals*	*Proposals too high*	*Proposals too low*	*No need for prescribed amount*	*Total*
Approved bodies					
Developers	19	5	—	3	27
Housing associations etc.	6	1	2	—	9
Other organisations					
Landlord organisations	1	2	—	—	3
Tenant organisations	1	—	1	1	3
Professional bodies	2	2	2	—	6
Housing corporation	—	1	—	—	1
Local authority associations	2	1	1	1	5
Total	31	12	6	5	54

Blackburn (Swimming Pool)

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement as to why the original decision by a planning inspector to refuse an application for the building of a swimming pool and sports hall by Queen Elizabeth grammar school, Blackburn, on land adjacent to Lamaark road, Blackburn, was quashed by the High Court; and when any new inquiry will be held.

Mr. Waldegrave: The inspector's decision dated 22 February 1985 was quashed by the High Court on 28 January 1986 on the basis that the inspector erred in failing to consider the evidence and argument as to the need for the proposed sports complex. The matter was referred back to the Secretary of State for redetermination and a further local inquiry has been arranged for 10 February 1987 before a fresh inspector.

Reema Dwellings

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of Reema dwellings in each local authority area, and the number still occupied in each case.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: A list by local authority areas of the number of dwellings designated under the Housing Defects legislation (including Reema hollow panel) has been placed in the Library of the House.

Information received from authorities about their ownership of later types of Reema dwellings was published in the BRE report "Large panel system dwellings: preliminary information on ownership and condition" (B. R. Reeves 1986) and I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library. We have no information on the occupancy of these dwellings.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will treat the problem of Reema construction in the same way as Airey construction, and make special resources available.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: The pre-1960 Reema hollow panel system has already been designated under the housing defects legislation. Other more recent types of Reema construction are currently being investigated by the Building Research Establishment and further action will need to be considered in the light of its findings.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a special capital allocation to Leeds city council to enable rehabilitation or replacement of Reema dwellings to take place, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: Following consultation with local authorities, I announced on 19 December the distribution of housing investment programme allocations to authorities for 1987-88. (Column *748-9*.) It is for Leeds city council to determine how best to utilise its HIP resources and any other spending power available to it.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has carried out into methods of rectifying defects in Reema multi-storey flats.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: The Building Research Establishment is undertaking a major study of large panel systems of construction, including Reema. This will provide advice on how to appraise the condition of large panel buildings and on possible remedial measures. A number of papers have already been published and seminars arranged for local authorities; further reports will follow.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from Leeds city council on the problem of Reema dwellings in the city, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: My right hon. Friend received no formal representations from Leeds city council about the problems of its Reema stock.

Multi-storey Flats

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a circular to local authorities unable to bring multi-storey flats up to his recommended safety standards, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January, 1987]: We have already issued advice to authorities on the safety of blocks of flats of large panel concrete construction. We will consider whether further advice is necessary in the light of the Building Research Establishment's continuing examination of the structural integrity and durability of such buildings.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Departmental Staff (Training)

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average number of days' training per year given to professional information technology staff within the Inland Revenue who are no longer trainees in the most recent years available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The figure is 8¼ days.

Data Processing Staff

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many data processing staff are in post within the Inland Revenue; and how many of those are trainees.

Mr. Norman Lamont: At 31 December 1986, the Department employed a total of 856 professional data processing staff at the levels executive officer to unified grade 3; 199 were trainees.

These figures exclude all staff at levels from clerical assistant to unified grade 6 employed on non-DP work, as well as staff at data processor and senior data processor levels.

Electronic Data Systems

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer to the Home Office; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place.

Mr. Brooke: Formal proposals in relation to the provision of a Government data network have yet to be received from Electronic Data Systems or from elsewhere in the private sector. If such a network is established there are at present no plans to use it for the exchange of information between Inland Revenue and the Home Office. There are also no plans for exchange of information between the Home Office and HM Customs and Excise, other than the properly authorised transfer on exising networks which provide an inquiry-only service on the vehicle keepers index held on the police national computer unit. A formal decision has yet to be made as to whether the PNCU network would be transferred to the Government data network, if it were established.

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer to the Department of Health and Social Security; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place.

Mr. Brooke: Formal proposals in relation to the provision of a Government data network have yet to be received from Electronic Data Systems or from elsewhere in the private sector. If such a network is established it is expected that the Inland Revenue will, in due course, wish to use the facility, with appropriate safeguards to protect confidentiality, to transfer information relating to income tax deductions and taxable national insurance benefits between the two Departments. This information, currently exchanged on magnetic tape, helps the Inland Revenue to calculate the correct income tax liability.

The number of such transfers is primarily determined by the number of individuals who are in employment or receive taxable national insurance benefits.

If such a network is established there are at present no plans to use it for the exchange of information between Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and DHSS.

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the planned computer network proposed by Electronic Data Systems, what kind of data he proposes to obtain from or transfer between the Inland Revenue and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; what is the anticipated number of such transfers; and for what purpose those transfers will take place.

Mr. Brooke: Formal proposals in relation to the provision of a Government data network have yet to be received from Electronic Data Systems or from elsewhere in the private sector. If such a network is established there are at present no plans to use it for the exchange of information between Inland Revenue and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Unemployment (Costs)

Mr. Evans asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of the present level of unemployment in the north-west.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that no figures are kept dividing benefit expenditure on the unemployed by regions.

Personal Equity Plan

Mr. Hirst asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has received about the personal equity plan scheme since its introduction.

Mr. Norman Lamont: 152 plan managers have already been registered by the Inland Revenue. Information of the number of investors is not available, but the scheme is being widely advertised and reports suggest that it has generated enormous interest.

Mr. Yeo asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many plan managers have registered under the personal equity plan scheme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: To date, 152 businesses have been registered by the Inland Revenue as plan managers, and a further 13 applications are being considered.

Budget (Representations)

Mr. Canavan asked the Chancellor how many representations he has received about his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations.

Taxation and Incentives Policy

Mr. Adley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what study his Department has conducted into the effect of taxation and incentives policy on productivity.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government's policy is to cut taxation and restore incentives. This will undoubtedly improve productivity and economic performance generally.

Marriage (Financial Disincentives)

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to remove the financial disincentives to marriage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I assume my hon. Friend has in mind ways in which the tax system treats a married couple less favourably than two single people. The Green Paper "The Reform of Personal Taxation", published last year, discussed how these "tax penalties" on marriage might be removed. The Government are currently studying the public response to the Green Paper.

Value Added Tax

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what rate the standard charge of value added tax could be reduced in order to achieve the same yield as now if all exemptions, zero rating and exclusions were removed.

Mr. Brooke: For legal and technical reasons it would not be possible to charge value added tax on all exempt, zero-rated or excluded items. However, just over a half of all consumers' expenditure is subject to value added tax at the standard rate. If the tax were to apply to all consumers' expenditure, the rate could by definition be roughly halved to achieve the same revenue yield as now.

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to introduce a lower band of income taxation at 15 per cent.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion but I cannot anticipate the Budget Statement.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the value of mortgage interest tax relief per private dwelling in Wales for each year from 1978-79 to 1986-87 in outturn terms and at 1986-87 prices;

(2) what has been the value of mortgage interest tax relief per mortgagor in Wales for each year from 1978-79 to 1986-87 in outturn terms and at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher rate taxpayers there are in each of the counties in England north of the Bristol-Wash line.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987, c. *231*]: Estimates of the number of tax units (married couples counted as one unit) liable to tax at the higher rates in each of the counties in England north of the Bristol-Wash line are given in the table which follows. The estimates, which are for 1984-85 (the latest year for which county estimates are available) are made from small samples: where this means that the actual number of higher rate taxpayers may be more than a third higher or lower than shown in the table, the numbers are indicated by [1].

	Thousands
Cleveland	4
Cumbria	5
Durham	[1]4
Northumberland	3
Tyne and Wear	[1]12
Humberside	[1]7
North Yorkshire	9
South Yorkshire	[1]10
West Yorkshire	24
Cheshire	23
Lancashire	24
Greater Manchester	13
Merseyside	13
Derbyshire	7
Leicestershire	10
Lincolnshire	[1]9
Northamptonshire	[1]7
Nottinghamshire	[1]10
Hereford and Worcestershire	7
Shropshire	5
Staffordshire	8
Warwickshire	7
West Midlands	27

Income Tax

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what ways of getting information about a taxpayer's income sources other than issuing an income tax return to him the Inland Revenue is examining.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987, c. *412-13*]: The Inland Revenue already receives information from a number of sources. The Keith committee put forward a number of recommendations on this issue, which are examined in the consultative document recently published by the Revenue.

THE ARTS

Arts Council

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister for the Arts what change he expects to see in his Department's grant to the Arts Council in 1987-88 in percentage terms.

Mr. Luce: Excluding additional abolition replacement funding, the percentage increase in government funding of the Arts Council in 1987-88 is 3·4 per cent. Total Government funding of the Arts Council is up by 2·1 per cent.

Government Grants

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister for the Arts what is the projected change in the Government's total grant to the arts between 1986-87 and 1987-88 in real terms and in cash terms.

Mr. Luce: I announced to the House of Commons on 17 November at columns 29-31 that the increase in total central Government provisions for the arts between 1986-87 and 1987-88 would be about 5½ per cent. In real terms that is an increase of about 1½ per cent., based upon the GDP deflator.

British Library

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister for the Arts what proportion of the Government's projected funding for the arts will be devoted to the British Library project at St. Pancras in 1987-88.

Mr. Luce: Final figures are still to be settled and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Local Authority Grants

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister for the Arts what has been the change in the total grant by the English local authorities to the arts between 1979 and 1986, both in real and in cash terms.

Mr. Luce: Information on the basis and for the period requested, is not available. Estimates of net revenue expenditure on the arts by local authorities in England and Wales from 1979-80 to 1984-85, are shown in "Facts about the Arts 2" published in 1986 by the Policy Studies Institute.

Welsh Arts Council

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister for the Arts what has been the actual and percentage change in his Department's grant to the Welsh Arts Council between 1979 and 1986 in real terms.

Mr. Luce: The Government's funding of the Welsh Arts Council, through the Arts Council of Great Britain, has increased in actual terms from £4,579,500 in 1979-80 to £7,610,000 in 1986-87; in real terms the funding level has been maintained.

Library and Information Plans

Sir David Price asked the Minister for the Arts what he is doing to encourage the introduction of library and information plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The library and information plan is a mechanism for contractual co-operation between all library and information services in a local authority area. Its purpose is to get maximum benefit from local resources.

The Library and Information Services Council commended the concept to me last year and asked me to encourage its introduction by contributing to the cost of drawing up plans in representative local authority areas. This I have been pleased to do.

Through the British Library research and development department, I am awarding Leicestershire county council, Staffordshire county council and the Northern Regional Library Bureau (an association of libraries in the North of England) £35,000 to encourage them to test this effective new means of co-operation. The British Library intends to match the awards which I am now making by further dispensations in 1987-88.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Crossroads Care Attendants (Exhibition)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to crossroads care attendants to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 16 to 20 February 1987.

Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total expenditure on supplementary benefit to pay for bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families in England in 1985-86; what he anticipates the expenditure to be in 1986-87; and if he will give this information for *(a)* England as a whole, *(b)* each area of his Department and *(c)* each local authority area.

Mr. Major: I regret that this information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to which local authorities in England at present disregard war pensions and war widow's pensions when calculating housing benefit.

Mr. Lyell: All local authorities administering housing benefit are required by law to apply a £4 disregard to war disablement and war widow's pensions. (Regulation 16 of the Housing Benefit Regulations, 1985).

Information on the number of authorities applying a discretionary disregard higher than the statutory amount is not held centrally.

Mortgage Interest (Benefits)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the total cost of mortgage interest payments to supplementary benefit recipients for each of the years 1979 to 1986; and if he will show the total number of claimants for each year.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Mortgage interest payments have been collected as a separate item only since 1983. Cost estimates for previous years are based on owner-occupiers' residual housing costs (that is after the deduction of rates, water rates, and repairs-insurance) and include an element for ground rent. The information available is as follows:

(£ million)

Year	Claimants	Total Cost
1979	98,000	31
1980	134,000	71
1981	196,000	124
1982	235,000	170
1983	242,000	[1]150
1984	277,000	[1]219
[2]1985		
[2]1986		

[1] Mortgage interest only.
[2] Information not yet available.

Redundancy Payments Scheme

Mr. John Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is giving consideration to the withdrawal of the redundancy payments scheme.

Mr. Newton: No.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of 19 January *Official Report* columns *427-28* to the hon. Member for Oldham, West on the hospital beds breakdown for 1985, what were the figures for the same regions and specialties in 1979, and what has been the percentage change in each case from 1979 to 1985.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Disabled People (Domestic Assistance Addition)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 18 December, *Official Report*, column 706, if disabled people in receipt of the domestic assistance addition after April 1988 under the transitional protection will also be eligible for the severe disability premium.

Mr. Major: Yes, although in calculating the need for transitional protection account will be taken of the severe disability premium when it is payable.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will define the term household for the purposes of eligibility for the severe disability premium; and if the presence of *(a)* an adult lodger or *(b)* an adult subtenant of the claimant will disqualify the claimant for the premium;

(2) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium if the only other adult member of the household is unable to provide assistance to that person on account of age or disability;

(3) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium for weeks in which the only other adult member of the household is absent from home;

(4) if the presence in the household of a student over 18 years in full-time education for whom no non-dependent deduction from housing benefit is currently made will disqualify a disabled person in receipt of attendance allowance from the severe disability premium;

(5) if a disabled person receiving attendance allowance will be eligible for the severe disability premium for weeks in which the only other adult member of the household has an infectious illness and would endanger the life of the disabled person if he or she provided the care and assistance required by that person.

Mr. Major: I shall let the right hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Disabled People (Talks)

Mr. Alffred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the issues discussed at and the outcome of the meeting at his Department on 21 January with organisations representing disabled people.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security and I had a constructive discussion with organisations representing disabled people across a wide range of issues concerning the effect of the social security reforms on disabled people. The disablement organisations have agreed to write to me setting out alternative proposals for the treatment of severely disabled people in the income-related schemes. I have undertaken, without commitment, to consider their proposals carefully. I have arranged for officials of the Department to assess the effect of the proposals when they are received, in discussion with representatives of the disability organisations. I have made clear my willingness to discuss the matter further with the disability organisations when this evaluation is complete.

Severe Weather Payments

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish the calculations of extra fuel consumption and costs on which his decision to fix supplementary benefit cold weather payments at £5 a week was based.

Mr. Major: The £5 payment is intended as a reasonable amount for extra costs, enabling speed of payments and certainty about the amount of help available. The principle of a flat-rate payment was considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee to be a particularly welcome simplification.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the daily mean temperature and *(b)* the weekly mean temperature for each of the weather stations used for calculating severe weather payments for the week 12 January to 18 January.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1987]: The information requested is as follows.

Week beginning Monday 12 January 1987

Weather station	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*	*Average*
Scotland								
Lerwick	−2·5	−0·3	−0·3	0·1	1·3	2·1	3·3	0·5
Wick	−2·6	−1·1	0·4	1·8	2·6	2·5	2·6	0·9
Stornaway	−2·0	0·5	0·3	1·4	2·9	4·1	5·6	1·8
Kinloss (Inverness)	−7·4	−5·3	−4·6	−1·3	0·3	0·6	2·8	−2·1
Aberdeen AP	−4·6	−4·0	−1·6	0·3	2·0	0·4	0·3	−1·0
Fort William	−6·8	−6·3	−3·8	0·3	2·5	1·3	4·3	−1·3
Leuchars (Dundee)	−3·8	−2·4	−1·5	1·2	2·1	0·6	−0·9	−0·7
Glasgow AP	−5·9	−4·5	−2·0	0·0	1·8	1·0	1·3	−1·2
Edinburgh AP	−6·1	−3·1	−1·5	0·5	1·8	−0·3	−0·5	−1·3
Machriphanish (Campbeltown)	−3·6	−2·9	−1·3	0·8	2·2	3·0	4·3	0·4
Prestwick (Ayr)	−6·8	−4·8	−2·6	0·1	1·3	−0·3	1·8	−1·6
Eskdalemuir (Galashiels)	−7·8	−6·0	−4·3	−1·1	0·1	−2·0	−2·4	−3·4
Whithorn (Stranraer)	−5·2	−3·8	−1·9	−0·2	1·5	1·3	1·0	−1·0
Dumfries	−6·5	−5·3	−2·3	0·3	1·3	0·0	−0·8	−1·9
Kirkwall	−2·3	−1·0	−0·5	1·0	2·0	2·2	2·4	0·5
England								
Boulmer (Berwick)	−3·8	−3·3	−1·2	1·1	2·4	0·6	−2·0	−0·9
Carlisle	−6·1	−5·6	−2·8	0·1	1·6	0·1	−1·7	−2·1
Eskmeals (Whitehaven)	−5·8	−4·1	−1·8	0·4	2·1	0·4	0·4	−1·2
Leeming (Newcastle)	−7·1	−5·9	−2·3	−0·3	0·7	−0·1	−2·4	−2·5
Tynemouth (Sunderland)	−3·1	−2·6	−0·8	1·2	2·1	1·3	−1·6	−0·5
Whitby CG	−4·3	−4·1	−2·5	0·7	0·5	0·3	−2·4	−1·7
Blackpool AP	−6·6	−4·6	−1·8	0·0	1·0	−0·8	−1·8	−2·1
Leeds WC	−6·4	−4·5	−3·0	−0·4	0·5	0·0	−2·3	−2·3
Aughton (Liverpool)	−5·8	−5·5	−2·7	−0·6	0·9	−0·9	−2·0	−2·5
Manchester AP	−5·8	−5·3	−2·4	−0·9	0·6	−0·9	−2·5	−2·5
Finningley (Sheffield)	−7·4	−6·6	−2·3	−0·6	0·4	−0·8	−2·5	−2·8
Binbrook (Hull)	−6·5	−7·7	−3·5	−1·3	0·1	−1·4	−2·6	−3·3
Coningsby (Boston)	−7·0	−7·3	−2·4	−1·4	0·6	−1·7	−1·9	−3·0
Shawbury (Shrewsbury)	−9·0	−8·4	−3·0	−1·9	0·6	−4·9	−3·4	−4·3
Birmingham AP	−7·4	−8·9	−3·4	−2·3	−0·3	−5·8	−5·0	−4·8
Watnall (Derby)	−7·6	−8·8	−3·4	−2·4	−0·5	−1·8	−3·3	−4·0
Marham (Kings Lynn)	−10·4	−8·5	−3·5	−2·3	−0·1	−2·6	−1·6	−4·1
Coltishall (Norwich)	−6·3	−6·6	−3·6	−2·4	0·3	−1·1	−1·3	−3·0
Wyton (Cambridge)	−9·0	−9·0	−4·1	−2·4	−0·7	−3·6	−2·3	−4·5
Bedford RAE	−9·6	−8·8	−4·4	−3·1	−3·3	−4·4	−2·8	−5·2
Stansted	−9·2	−7·4	−5·1	−2·5	−1·0	−2·1	−2·6	−4·3
Honington (Bury St. Edmunds)	−9·6	−8·6	−4·2	−2·5	−0·1	−3·5	−1·7	−4·3
Wattisham (Ipswich)	−9·2	−7·3	−4·6	−2·9	−1·0	−1·6	−1·9	−4·1
Brize Norton (Oxford)	−8·5	−7·4	−5·1	−2·9	−0·4	−2·4	−1·9	−4·1
Heathrow AP (London)	−7·5	−6·2	−4·7	−2·3	−0·5	−1·4	−1·6	−3·5
Manston (Dover)	−6·8	−6·1	−4·1	−2·0	−1·7	−2·9	−2·4	−3·7
Herstmonceux (Brighton)	−10·0	−8·6	−5·8	−2·2	−1·0	−2·8	−2·8	−4·7
Gatwick AP (Guildford)	−8·0	−7·4	−4·9	−2·1	−1·2	−2·8	−2·4	−4·2
Easthampstead (Basingstoke)	−10·1	−8·8	−5·0	−2·9	−0·6	−1·8	−2·2	−4·5
Bristol	−6·6	−6·3	−3·7	−1·9	1·0	−0·5	0·0	−2·6
Lyneham (Chippenham)	−9·3	−8·9	−5·8	−3·8	−0·8	−2·1	−1·5	−4·6
Boscombe Down (Sarum)	−8·4	−7·4	−5·1	−3·4	−0·6	−1·8	−1·6	−4·1
Southampton WC	−7·0	−6·4	−4·8	−2·3	0·1	−0·6	−0·4	−3·1
Bournemouth AP	−7·8	−6·9	−4·9	−2·8	0·0	−0·7	−0·4	−3·3
Yeovilton (Yeovil)	−7·3	−7·0	−5·8	−2·7	0·6	−0·4	−0·6	−3·3
Exeter	−6·9	−6·3	−4·8	−2·4	0·7	−0·3	0·6	−2·8
Chivenor (Barnstable)	−5·1	−4·5	−2·6	−1·6	1·1	−0·7	0·3	−1·9
Okehampton	−9·3	−9·1	−6·7	−5·3	−2·4	−2·3	−0·6	−5·2
Mount Batten (Plymouth)	−5·5	−5·5	−3·4	−1·9	0·8	1·4	1·7	−1·8
St. Mawgan (Truro)	−5·8	−6·1	−4·2	−2·1	0·5	0·8	1·6	−2·2
Culdrose (Penzance)	−5·0	−7·7	−5·0	−2·3	0·1	0·9	2·3	−2·4
Wales								
Valley (Caernarfon)	−5·1	−4·3	−1·6	−0·1	1·4	1·2	2·4	−0·9
Trawsfynydd (Dolgellau)	−7·9	−6·6	−3·5	−2·0	−1·9	−0·1	0·0	−3·2
Aberporth (Aberystwyth)	−6·6	−5·4	−2·4	−1·5	0·3	−0·6	0·0	−2·3
Brawdy (Pembroke)	−6·8	−6·5	−3·4	−1·9	0·3	1·3	1·7	−2·2
Mumbles (Swansea)	−5·3	−5·9	−2·5	−1·3	1·1	0·7	0·6	−1·8
Cilfynydd (Merthyr Tydfil)	−8·3	−8·1	−5·1	−3·6	−0·6	2·1	−2·3	−3·7
Rhoose (Cardiff)	−7·3	−7·0	−3·8	−2·6	0·4	−1·3	−0·8	−3·2

SOCIAL SERVICES

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, on the basis of what precise section of primary or secondary legislation he decided that all persons in the relevant categories would receive a £5 exceptionally severe weather payment in the week 12-18 January.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply, 21 January 1987*]: Exceptionally severe weather payments are made under the provisions of Regulation 26A of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1981 (S.I. No. 1528) as amended by the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Amendment Regulations 1986 (S.I. No. 1961). As I made clear in my statement on Tuesday 13 January, it seemed highly probable at the time that all persons in the eligible groups would qualify for these payments in the week 12-18 January. In a certain number of areas, the qualifying temperature condition was not met. Payments in these areas were accordingly made on ex gratia basis with the consent of the Treasury and within the normal conventions for payments of this sort.

Maternity and Death Grants

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether it remains the Government's intention to abolish maternity and death grants in April 1987;

(2) whether he has sought independent legal advice regarding the legality of the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1986.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to my statement to the House today.

AIDS

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he has not yet replied to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East's letter dated 20 November concerning the request for £10,000 for the development of a computer-aided-decision taking system for AIDS (CADETS) by the district medical officer for north Warwickshire in conjunction with Warwick university; and if he will reply forthwith.

Mr. Newton: My noble Friend replied to the hon. Member on 21 January 1987.

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to provide a full reply to the question of the hon. Member for Northampton, North about AIDS to which a holding reply was given on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *294*.

Mr. Newton: I replied to my hon. Friend on 20 January 1987.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has that the AIDS virus is transmitted in semen and vaginal fluid; and what evidence he has that the AIDS virus is not transmitted during the exchange of saliva in kissing.

Mr. Newton: There is good epidemiological evidence that the great majority of cases of infection with HIV (the AIDS virus) have occurred following penetrative sexual intercourse; virtually all the remaining cases have been associated with injections of infected blood, blood products or injecting drug misues. This evidence does not support transmission of infection through kissing. Non-sexual family contacts of infected people have not contracted the infection, in spite of kissing.

Transmission of infection has occurred following artificial insemination of infected semen: in this instance no form of direct contact between the subjects concerned took place.

The reasons for our advice on kissing are given in my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 19 December 1986 at column *783*.

Chiropodists and Speech Therapists

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in respect of each English district health authority the ratio of *(a)* chiropodists and *(b)* speech therapists per head of population in 1980 and at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Social Workers

Mrs Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what arrangements are being made for approval of social workers under the Mental Health Act 1983, following the expiry of the arrangements to give transitional approval to certain social workers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's discussions with local authority associations, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work and the National and Local Government Officers Association about the current Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work proposals for new training courses for social workers; what issues are still outstanding; and when he expects the full implementation of longer term arrangements for approved social workers under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Adolescents (Care)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received a copy of the report of the British Paediatric Association working party on the needs and care of adolescents; and what plans and policies he has for the in-patient hospital care of adolescents.

Mrs. Currie: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list initiatives by his Department which have been of benefit specifically to residents in Leicester.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: Leicester has benefited, along with other areas, from the general increase in expenditure on health, personal social services and social security in recent years. The Department's local social security offices in the area are

working in close liaison with major statutory and voluntary agencies, to improve the service to the public. For example, Leicester (Norton street) ILO has reduced the average clearance time for supplementary benefit claims from 15 days to 4 days since February 1986, and has recently introduced a fast-flow reception point.

The provision of health services in Leicester is primarily a matter for Leicestershire health authority and Leicestershire family practitioner committee. The health authority has experienced a real growth of 34 per cent. in revenue funding in the period 1978-79 to 1986-87. In 1985 phase 1 of the Glenfield general hospital became fully operational, and phase 2 of this major new development is to start later this year. Plans are now well advanced for the full computerisation of the Leicestershire family practitioner committees' records and it is anticipated that a fully computerised cervical cytology call and recall system will be instituted this year.

Leicestershire was one of the ten pilot areas for the centrally funded Asian Mother and Baby Campaign, under which link-workers are employed to improve access to maternity services by overcoming linguistic barriers between patients and staff. The Department is also funding a project in Leicester as part of its initiative to enable mentally handicapped children to be moved from long-stay hospitals. Under a central funding initiative set up in 1983, £360,000 was allocated to Leicestershire health authority over a three year period, to enable it to develop a comprehensive service for drug misusers. An additional sum of £94,000 has been allocated in 1986-87 for further improvements to the services for this client group.

Condoms

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* information available to him on the unit retail price for condoms in each European Economic Community country.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987, c. *206*]: The manufacturer's recommended retail price for a condom in this country ranges from about 16p-24p (including VAT). Information in this form for other European Community countries is not collected. Inquiries of a leading United Kingdom manufacturer suggest, though, that the unit retail price of their products is lower in the United Kingdom, sometimes considerably so, than in other EC countries.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people over retirement age in the Leeds metropolitan district council area were in receipt of supplementary benefit in 1984, 1985 and at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lyell [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1987, c. *346*]: Following a reorganisation of work in October 1986, Leeds metropolitan district council area is now covered by the Department's five offices at Leeds east, Leeds west, Leeds south, Leeds north and Leeds north-west. The table shows the number of people over retirement age in receipt of supplementary benefit from these offices in December 1986, the latest available figures, and on comparable dates in 1984 and 1985:

Year	Number
[1]1984	24,956
1985	23,564
1986	24,421

[1]Source 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Prior to October 1986 some parts of the Leeds metropolitan district council area were covered by the Department's offices at Castleford, York and Harrogate. However, information is not available about the number of pensioners in that area whose supplementary benefit was handled by those offices.

NHS (Beds)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now take steps to prevent any further cut back in National Health Service acute beds.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 21 January 1987]: Since the inception of the National Health Service increasing numbers of patients have been treated in fewer acute beds partly because those beds have been more efficiently used and partly because of different patterns of care, such as increased day-case treatment, supported by increased resources. It is for health authorities to decide how much weight should be given to numbers of acute beds which are only one factor in a complex planning process.

Mentally Handicapped People (Homes)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he gives to health authorities on procedure to be followed on the siting of homes for mentally handicapped people within the community; what discussions have taken place between officials of his Department and East Dorset health authority on this subject insofar as it relates to the proposed home at Broadlands, Ferndown; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 21 January 1987]: Health authorities (as Crown bodies) are not generally subject to the Town and Country Planning Acts, but, where the proposed development would normally require a planning application, health authorities are required to consult the local planning authority in accordance with a non-statutory procedure laid down by the Department of the Environment.

Health authorities are given guidance on care in the community pilot projects (Annex E of HC(83)6/LAC(83) 5)* that siting of any residential accommodation should take account of the need to establish community links with access to the same health, education and social services, shops and transport, as are normally available to other people living in the community. Guidance to health authorities about the registration and inspection of nursing homes* issued by the Department and by the National Association of Health Authorities is concerned only with the control of standards and not with location.

The only discussion between officials of the Department and the East Dorset health authority about the proposed nursing home at Broadlands, Ferndown, has been to establish the facts, as the matter was drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend. I understand that the health authority, in strict compliance with the above Department of the Environment non-statutory procedure, consulted the local planning authority regarding the

proposed change of use of the premises, and formal notification of the proposal was passed to the local authority on 23 September with the request that it be dealt with as a matter of urgency. This was because of failures to obtain other suitable properties in the area against competition from other prospective purchasers.

The great majority of mentally handicapped people have always lived in the community. The Government's policy is to achieve a major shift from institutional care for mentally handicapped people to a range of community care according to individual needs, but with specialised residential health provision for people with special medical or nursing needs. The Government's response* to the report of the Social Services Committee on community care (Cmnd. 9674) said that the statutory authorities recognised the importance of carrying the wider community with them when the objective is enabling vulnerable people to play their full part in the community, and be accepted as part of it, and that voluntary work by people of all ages, and the involvement of local churches etc. are encouraging a sense of belonging, participation, sharing and mutual respect. Mentally handicapped people themselves are often their own best advocates.

* These publications are available in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Forestry

9. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the criteria for releasing agricultural land in England for the planting of trees.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The criteria for releasing the transfer of agricultural land to forestry in England are kept under review in the light of all relevant factors.

54. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will relax his ministerial criteria for the release of land for forestry purposes.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The criteria for clearing the transfer of agricultural land to forestry in England are kept under review in the light of all relevant factors.

Mr. Steen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many acres of agricultural land have been used for that purpose in each of the last five years, distinguishing between agricultural use and forestry.

Mr. Gummer: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

10. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to increase the present number of environmentally sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: On 18 December I laid before Parliament orders designating five English environmentally sensitive areas. If these areas prove as successful as I hope, the case for further designations will clearly be strengthened.

Cereals

11. **Mr. Ralph Howell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans for the introduction of a set-aside system for cereal production in the Community.

25. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to make public his set-aside scheme for surplus cereal land.

48. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to implement his proposals for a set-aside scheme for surplus cereal land.

Mr. Gummer: The Council of Ministers, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend, agreed in principle in December that measures should be introduced to divert land out of commodities in surplus, including cereals.

19. **Mr. Raymsford** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Agriculture Ministers to discuss cereal surpluses within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Gummer: Discussions on the Commission's 1987-88 agriculture price proposals, which we expect shortly, are likely to cover the question of cereal surpluses.

31. **Mr. Hamilton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make it his policy to oppose any scheme put forward within the EEC for quotas for cereals production.

Mr. Gummer: This is already our policy.

No Member state, nor the Commission, advocates the introduction of quotas in the cereals sector.

Common Agricultural Policy

12. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost of the common agricultural policy in pounds sterling in the Council's draft 1987 budget; what reduction there will be in this amount as a result of the recent agreement on alterations for milk and beef; what further reduction in common agricultural policy costs arising from the agreement there will be in 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The provision in the 1987 draft budget for expenditure under the common agricultual policy is about £16·7 billion. The measures agreed by the Agriculture Council on 16 December are expected to reduce expenditure by some £650 million in 1987 and £230 million in 1988.

39. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the National Farmers Union concerning his proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: I have received a number of representations from the National Farmers Union about the reform of the common agricultural policy, including those reforms agreed at the Agriculture Council on 13-16 December.

43. **Dr. Roger Thomas** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to discuss the structure proposals at the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Jopling: The timetable for further discussion of the socio-structural proposals is now a matter for the Belgian presidency. However, I expect further Council discussion of the package in the next few weeks.

45. **Mrs. Shields** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the impact on

employment and the rural economy in areas of Britain affected by milk quotas of the recent common agricultural policy agreement.

Mr. Gummer: It is not possible to judge precisely what will be the effect on employment and the rural economy of the measures agreed by the Council of Ministers last month. But they should create a greater long term stability in the dairy sector by bringing supply into better balance with demand.

46. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is now in a position to give further details of the savings to the Community's budget as a result of the agreement on reform of the common agricultural policy by the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission has estimated that the agreement on milk and beef, including the programme for disposal of butter stocks with deferred reimbursement to member states, will reduce Community expenditure as follows:

	mecu
1987	−1,020
1988	−490
1989	−245

The Committee has also stated that the new socio-structural measures, which the Council agreed in principle, could result in net savings to the Community budget of about 520 mecu a year when fully in operation.

Rural Economy

13. **Mr. Cash** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures will be taken to sustain the rural economy.

Mr. Jopling: The Government already provide a wide range of support for agriculture and forestry which helps to sustain the rural economy.

Agriculture-related Industries

14. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will now publish a White Paper setting out the detailed implications for the long-term development of all sectors within agriculture-related industries of the decisions reached at the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 15 to 17 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: Decisions reached at the Council of Agriculture Ministers in December primarily concerned the reform of the beef and dairy regimes. The Government will continue to use all appropriate means to promote its policies for CAP reform, which are in the long-term interest of all involved in agriculture, as well as of consumers and taxpayers.

Agriculture and the Environment

17. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to reconcile the needs of agriculture and the environment.

41. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to reconcile the needs of agriculture and of the environment.

Mr. Jopling: It is, and has been for some time, the Government's policy to integrate environmental objectives into the design of agricultural policy. To this end I have sought in my recent organisation of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service to ensure that it is in the best possible position to balance its advice on efficient agricultural production with advice on relevant environmental considerations. The new front-line Farm and Countryside Service will provide expert advice that combines all these elements.

Butter

18. **Mr. Holt** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures will be taken to dispose of surplus stocks of butter.

21. **Mr. Favell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further measures will be taken to dispose of surplus stocks of butter.

Mr. Gummer: Stock disposal measures are the responsibility of the European Commission. It has told the Council that its future plans concentrate on measures which will not disturb the normal Community market.

Agricultural Production

20. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to encourage more extensive production on agricultural land.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A scheme of aid to help reduce surpluses by encouraging more extensive agricultural production is under active discussion in Brussels as part of the socio-structural package.

My right hon. Friend will also be aware that orders have recently been laid before Parliament designating six environmentally sensitive areas in which certain forms of extensive production will be encouraged.

Milk and Beef

22. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received following the decision taken by the European Economic Community Agriculture Ministers to cut the level of production for milk and beef.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a number of such representations. Some point to the problems of individual producers, others to the overall success of these decisions.

Fertilisers

23. **Mr. Evans** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions presently apply to farmers on the use of nitrogen-based fertilisers; and what plans he has further to restrict their use.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There are no general restrictions on the use of nitrogen-based fertilisers. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service publishes recommendations on fertiliser use and encourages farmers to assess the requirements of their crops accurately, and to restrict applications to those times when the crops can utilise the nitrogen.

29. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies have been conducted by his Department on the use of nitrogen-based fertilisers on farms and its effect on trees.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As indicated in my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) my Department is undertaking a number of studies relating to nitrogen fertilisers. This has included work on the responses of nitrogen fertilisers and other nutrient, on horticultural tree species.

Dairy Quotas

24. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the details of assistance to dairy farmers as a result of the cutback in milk quotas over the next two years.

Mr. Gummer: The Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in December agreed to increase the rate of compensation under the Community outgoers scheme to 27·5p per litre spread over seven years and to fix compensation for the temporary suspension of quota at 6·5p per litre per year. Regulations laying down the detailed arrangements for these payments are likely to be approved by the Council in the near future.

38. **Mr. Knox** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement about the operation of milk quotas.

Mr. Gummer: I made a statement on 17 December describing a package of measures in the milk sector that had been adopted by the Council of Ministers. This agreement is a major achievement which will help restore balance to the market and should result in substantial savings to the Community budget.

44. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many creamery workers he expects will lose employment as a result of the proposed 9·5 per cent. cut back in milk quotas in the next two years.

Mr. Gummer: I accept that the implementation of the quota reductions agreed by the Council of Ministers last month will be a painful process and may involve the loss of some jobs. The extent of possible redundancies will depend on a variety of factors including the industry's response to changes in the market.

Pesticides

26. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends meeting representatives of farmworkers to discuss pesticide control regulation.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I am available to discuss any items of major concern to farmworkers' representatives in the field of pesticide controls.

Cereals (Over-production)

27. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any immediate plans to reduce the grain mountain.

Mr. Gummer: We shall continue to tackle the problem of cereals over-production by pressing for a restrictive price policy and other market measures complemented by a land diversion scheme.

Food Surpluses

28. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action is being taken to tackle food surpluses beyond that announced on 17 December.

30. **Mr. Charles Morrison** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action is being taken to control the costs of the common agricultural policy beyond that announced on 17 December.

34. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action is being taken to control the costs of the common agricultural policy.

42. **Mr. Latham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on progress regarding the problem of surpluses since the statement to the House on 17 December by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

49. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been agreed to curb the over-production of food in Europe, beyond those announced on 17 December.

52. **Mr. Hayward** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to tackle food surpluses beyond that announced on 17 December.

Mr. Jopling: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley).

32. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress was made in measures to reduce food surpluses during his presidency of the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Jopling: Persistent efforts throughout our presidency to achieve reforms of the common agricultural policy culminated at the December Agriculture Council in considerable progress being made in tackling the problems in the milk and beef sectors. These results were reported fully to the House by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 17 December.

Agricultural Land and Buildings

33. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will consider re-rating agricultural land and buildings.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Rating policy is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. On 10 July 1986 a reply was given on this subject to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, West and Torridge (Sir P. Mills) making clear that the Government have no plans for re-rating agricultural land and buildings.

35. **Mr. McLoughlin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect on farm incomes and food prices of a re-rating of agricultural land and buildings.

51. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effects on agriculture of re-rating agricultural land and buildings.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) earlier today.

50. **Mr. Best** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding the status for rating purposes of agricultural land.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Over the past year my Department has received five representations on the rating of agricultural land. Three of these asked for the extension of agricultural de-rating to buildings occupied by non-agricultural horses, one was in favour of retaining the current de-rating of agricultural land and buildings and one expressed opposition to the current position. Responsibility for rating policy rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Milk Prices

36. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the percentage by which the milk price paid to producers has risen over the past three years.

Mr. Gummer: The average net price received by wholesale producers in the United Kingdom rose by 4·9 per cent. between 1983-84 and 1985-86. A further increase of about 3 per cent. is expected for 1986-87.

Less-favoured Areas

37. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the prospects for producers in the less-favoured areas in 1987.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 17 December 1986.

Farm Incomes

40. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect on farm incomes of the changes in arrangements for intervention buying of beef and support of production.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart).

55. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for the most recent 12-month period for which information is available, what was the percentage change in farm incomes.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Farming income in calendar year 1985 was forecast to be 43 per cent. lower than in 1984. The final figure, and a forecast for calendar year 1986, will appear in the "Annual Review of Agriculture 1987," which is to be published shortly.

Community Budget

47. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the emergency measures in the milk sector on the Community's budget.

Mr. Jopling: The measures on milk agreed by the Council of Ministers in December are expected to result in substanital savings to the Community budget, amounting to 2 becu over the period 1987 to 1989, and in the longer term to becu per year.

Agricultural Workers (Wages)

53. **Miss Maynard** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the average post-tax earnings of full-time employed workers in agriculture.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No information is available on the average post-tax earnings of agricultural workers: the tax situation of workers on any given gross wage will vary according to individual circumstances. In the 12 months ended September 1986 the average gross weekly earnings of regular whole-time hired men in agriculture in England and Wales were £141·10 for 47·1 hours.

Beef

Mr. Warren asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action has been taken to counter the problems caused to United Kingdom beef producers in the United Kingdom home market as a result of Irish imports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Irish derived an unacceptable advantage from the devaluation of the green punt in the middle of the marketing year. The United Kingdom made absolutely clear its opposition to changes of this kind, particularly in the middle of the marketing year, and likewise made it clear that devaluation in Ireland would make necessary a devaluation of the green pound, which we achieved in December.

Veal Crates

Mr. Crowther asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he can now give an approximate date on which he expects to introduce legislation to phase out the use of veal crates;

(2) over what period he intends to phase out the use of veal crates.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We are currently seeking the views of interested organisations on our proposals to ban the use of veal crates, and would expect to be able to lay draft regulations before Parliament in next few months. We have proposed that the use of veal crates should be phased out over a period of not more than three years.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Thurnham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the current level of intervention stocks.

Mr. Jopling: A note setting out the volume of intervention stocks in the European Community as a whole and in the United Kingdom separately is deposited

in the Library of the House and is updated monthly. The Government promote policies which surplus production and storage.

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 19 January.

Mr. Jopling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on Wednesday 21 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir Peter Mills).

DEFENCE

Foxhunter Radar

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Foxhunter radar.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The AI24 Foxhunter radar, which is being developed by GEC Avionics for the Tornado air defence variant, does not yet meet in full the requirements of the Royal Air Force. A number of problems which have arisen during the development of the radar have contributed to time and cost overruns.

The programme of work is being defined with the contractor to provide the basis for a satisfactory resolution of these problems and the achievement of an acceptable performance standard for the radar. It is the Ministry's intention to agree a firm price contract for the satisfactory completion of this programme.

Private Contractors (Security)

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence who will bear the cost of vetting for security the employees of private contractors under contract with his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government already meet the cost of any security inquiries which may be necessary concerning private contractors' employees. There are no plans to change this practice.

Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has sought the views of the managers and senior officers of Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington, about the proposed contractorisation plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A study into the feasibility of contracting-out administrative support functions at the Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington and its associated garrison has recently been completed. This is now being considered in the MOD and the views of local management on the report are being sought as part of that process.

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish a list of those representations he has received which support the contractorisation plans for Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington.

Mr. Freeman: The only representations so far received on the Department's proposals for the contracting-out of administrative support functions at the Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington and its association garrison are those of the trade unions concerned and of members of the work force. They do not support the proposals.

Ships (Operating Costs)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of running and maintaining a Rothesay class frigate for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £5·5 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining a Leander class frigate for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £6·5 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining an assault ship for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £12·5 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining an ASW carrier for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £33 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining a type 21 frigate for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £7 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining a type 42 destroyer for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £15 million at current prices.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost of running and maintaining a type 22 frigate for one year.

Mr. Freeman: About £12 million at current prices.

Air Defence

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will outline the procedure by which a Tornado F3 aircraft will be guided to a hostile aircraft approaching United Kingdom airspace so that it can locate and intercept it;

(2) if he will outline the methods by which hostile aircraft approaching United Kingdom airspace are located.

Mr. Stanley: Potentially hostile aircraft can be located by a variety of methods. The most common is by radars located on the ground, at sea and airborne, and these will include assets of our NATO Allies. The Tornado F3, like any intercepting aircraft, would be guided to its target by fighter controllers using multi-source target information. Details of sources and procedures are classified.

Trident

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the expenditure on the Trident programme in each year since 1979 up until 1 January at both current and constant prices.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall answer shortly.

Northern Ireland (Fatalities)

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed services from the county of Kent have been *(a)* killed or *(b)* seriously wounded in Northern Ireland since 1969.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Recruitment

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he holds concerning officer entry by type of school education for the different groups of regiments and services within the Army.

Mr. Freeman: The information readily available relates only to those officer candidates who have been recommended by the Regular Commissions Board for entry to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst for the Army as a whole.

The latest returns from the RCB for the period April-November 1986 show that 50·2 per cent. of the successful applicants were from the state sector and 49·8 per cent. from the independent sector.

International Communications (Cost)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the likely final cost of establishing an international communications network for the armed forces.

Mr. Younger: The armed forces employ a wide range of international communications networks. These systems are constantly being updated and the cost of individual projects, many of which are highly classified, varies.

Intelligence Gathering

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the money spent so far by his Department in exploring the establishment of an intelligence gathering system for the armed forces.

Mr. Younger: The armed forces employ a wide range of intelligence gathering systems. These systems are constantly being updated and the cost of individual projects, many of which are highly classified, varies.

"The Secret Society"

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what advice his Department gave the director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation concerning the broadcast of a programme in the British Broadcasting Corporation series "The Secret Society", dealing with one of his Department's projects.

Mr. Younger: Advice was given to the BBC about security aspects of the proposed programme.

Electronic Surveillance System

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the total cost of the project to provide the armed forces with an electronic surveillance system.

Mr. Younger: The armed forces employ a wide range of electronic surveillance systems. These systems are constantly being updated and the cost of individual projects, many of which are highly classified, varies.

Low Frequency Transmitter, Glengowrie

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department will install an extremely low frequency transmitter at Glengowrie, Scotland; and if he will estimate the cost of such a transmitter.

Mr. Younger: Subject to the outcome of a detailed civil engineering survey, which will commence in the spring, and to planning agreement, it is hoped to begin installation of a trial ELF aerial in the Glengarry forest later this year. At this stage a reliable cost estimate is not available.

Polaris

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department plans to improve the Polaris communications system.

Mr. Younger: We are entirely satisfied with the existing Polaris communications arrangements and have no plans for any major changes or improvements.

Member's Questions

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to give a substantive reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras due for answer on Tuesday 13 January.

Mr. Freeman: I have replied today.

AIDS and Venereal Disease

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence over what period the 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Highlanders was stationed in Kenya.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: The 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Highlanders was deployed to Kenya for an exercise which took place between 22 October and 10 December 1986. It was airlifted to Kenya on several flights, the first of which arrived in Kenya on 12 October. It returned to the United Kingdom, again on several flights, the last of which left Kenya on 18 December.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department and the RAMC respectively became aware that the AIDS virus was common in parts of Kenya.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: Although a report in a medical journal in December 1984 had indicated a high prevalence of AIDS in Central Africa, the extent of the problem in other parts of Africa was not widely known either in general or by my Department or the RAMC until early 1986.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department and the RAMC respectively became aware that the AIDS virus could be transmitted by heterosexual relations.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: The possibility of transfer of the AIDS virus by heterosexual intercourse was first known by the MOD and RAMC in 1984.

Based on the knowledge at that time, the risk of wider dissemination of AIDS through heterosexual intercourse was thought to be extremely low.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of all ranks of the 1st Battalion, Queens Own Highlanders are known to the Royal Army Medical Corps to have venereal disease caught in Kenya.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: It is not my Department's policy to disclose information on medical matters which is covered by medical confidentiality rules.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what orders or advice on the risk of AIDS from prostitutes in Kenya were given to officers and other ranks of the 1st Battalion, Queens Own Highlanders.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: Following common practice for all units moving overseas, the 1st Battalion, Queens Own Highlanders was instructed on all relevant health hazards, including heart illness, malaria and communicable disease (which includes sexually transmitted disease and AIDS), by the mobile health inspection team prior to its departure. A handout was distributed throughout the battalion which highlighted the increased danger of association with prostitutes.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what orders or advice have been issued to members of each of the armed forces about the dangers of AIDS; and when they were issued.

Mr. Freeman [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1987, c. *159*]: In late October 1986 distribution began of copies of the Health Education Council booklet, "AIDS—what everyone needs to know". Every member of the armed forces is to receive a copy. It contains information on the disease and an insert advising anyone who believes himself to be at risk to seek immediate advice and counselling from unit medical officers. The booklet issue should be completed shortly.

Posters warning of the AIDS danger were circulated at the same time for prominent display in service units.

Since last summer AIDS warnings have been incorporated in all drug education briefing for service personnel.

Comprehensive briefing is also given by medical staffs to service personnel serving, or about to deploy, overseas on the dangers of human immunodeficiency virus infection. The surgeon general's staff has also issued through the medical chain of command, for distribution to all medical officers, DHSS booklets, 1, 2 and 3 "Information and Guidance on AIDS on handling of HIV anti-body positive cases".

Meteorological Office

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the Meteorological Office weather stations, indicating *(a)* minimum night temperatures, *(b)* daily mean temperatures and *(c)* weekly mean temperatures for the weeks 5 January to 11 January and 12 January to 18 January 1987, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: The Meteorological Office receives temperature data on a regular basis from some 600 locations in the United Kingdom. About 75 per cent. of these are manned by voluntary co-operating observers who submit their data only monthly in retrospect. Of the remaining 150 or so stations, a number either do not return observations for more than five days in each week, or are demographically unrepresentative. Moreover, to extract some 4,500 values manually to meet the hon. Member's criteria would involve disproportionate effort and expense.

However, data from the 67 observing stations participating in the DHSS exceptionally cold weather payments scheme, which are readily available in the format requested by the hon. Member, are provided in the tables for the weeks 5 to 11 and 12 to 18 January 1987. The minimum night temperatures for the same stations have been separately provided by manual extraction.

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Week 2 (5 January 1987 to 11 January 1987)

Daily mean value

Weekly means	*Local office name*	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*
−0·6	Aberdeen AP	2·3	2·2	2·8	−1·0	−2·3	−3·4	−4·4
−0·4	Dumfries	5·6	2·9	1·3	−3·5	−3·3	−1·2	−4·9
−1·2	Edinburgh AP	3·3	2·8	−1·5	−4·0	−2·8	−2·3	−4·1
T −2·0	Eskdalemuir	2·6	1·3	0·4	−5·6	−3·8	−2·2r j 8·3	−6·9
−0·1	Fort William	4·5	2·3	−1·8	−3·3	−1·0	−0·3	−1·3
−0·6	Glasgow AP	4·0	2·6	−1·8	−4·5	−1·8	0·6	−3·3
−0·6	Kinloss	2·6	2·5	1·8	−1·9	−3·0	−2·3	−4·0
1·8	Kirkwall	2·9	3·1	2·6	2·6	1·4	1·9	−2·0
1·6	Lerwick	2·5	2·0	2·8	3·2	3·3	0·1	−2·6
−0·4	Leuchars	2·8	3·1	0·4	−3·4	−2·3	−1·4	−2·3
1·9	Machrihanish	5·0	4·9	0·0	1·0	1·5	2·5	−1·6
0·4	Prestwick	4·8	3·4	−1·0	−1·8	0·4	1·0	−3·9
2·3	Stornoway	3·4	3·5	3·0	2·5	3·3	0·5	−0·6
1·5	Whithorn	6·3	3·1	0·1	0·1	1·8	1·1	−2·3
1·1	Wick	2·1	2·1	1·5	−0·3	1·0	1·9	−1·0
2·1	Aberporth	6·1	5·5	2·4	0·6	2·0	2·0	−3·6
1·9	Brawdy	6·4	5·3	0·7	0·6	1·6	2·2	−3·3
2·3	Bristol	7·5	6·3	3·4	0·2	0·8	1·6	−3·5
2·6	Chivenor	7·9	6·9	1·2	0·3	1·6	2·9	−2·8
0·1	Cilfyndd	5·8	3·6	−1·0	−1·7	−1·4	0·5	−5·0
4·4	Culdrose	7·9	6·3	2·1	4·3	6·6	3·3	0·3
2·0	Exeter	7·6	5·7	0·9	0·0	1·5	1·9	−3·4

Weekly means	Local office name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
0·1	Lyneham	5·8	3·8	0·9	−1·4	−2·0	−0·3	−6·1
3·3	Mumbles	6·9	5·6	3·2	3·1	2·9	3·3	−2·3
0·3	Okehampton	5·1	3·0	−1·0	−0·8	1·7	0·4	−6·0
1·4	Rhoose	6·9	4·7	1·5	−0·3	−0·2	1·4	−4·2
3·5	St. Mawgan	7·8	6·6	1·1	2·3	5·8	3·4	−2·3
0·6	Trawsfynydd	4·6	3·9	1·0	−0·5	−0·5	0·3	−4·8
2·5	Valley	7·0	6·2	2·0	0·9	2·3	2·1	−3·1
1·0	Yeovilton	6·8	5·7	0·3	−1·6	−1·1	1·1	−4·2
0·2	Brize Norton	6·1	4·9	0·5	−1·9	−2·0	−0·3	−4·8
0·5	Boscombe Down	6·0	4·3	0·3	−1·3	−1·3	0·5	−4·9
1·0	Bournemouth AP	6·6	4·0	0·1	−0·9	−1·4	1·5	−4·0
3·6	Mount Batten	8·5	6·6	2·3	2·4	4·7	2·5	−2·0
−0·3	Easthampstead	6·5	3·6	−1·1	−2·0	−4·0	0·0	−5·0
0·5	Gatwick AP	6·6	4·4	0·6	−2·7	0·0	0·0	−5·0
0·6	Herstmonceux	6·3	3·4	1·4	−1·3	−0·1	−0·1	−5·8
0·9	Manston	5·5	4·3	2·2	0·5	−1·3	−0·4	−4·8
2·2	Southampton WC	7·3	5·3	1·8	1·3	1·3	1·8	−3·6
1·1	Heathrow AP	6·8	4·6	1·5	−1·7	0·2	0·5	−4·3
−0·1	Stansted	5·3	3·4	0·1	0·0	−2·7	−1·2	−5·8
0·0	Coltishall	4·5	3·9	2·8	−0·8	−2·2	−2·9	−5·3
−0·5	Marham	4·8	3·1	0·8	−1·7	−1·9	−1·6	−7·2
0·0	Wyton	5·9	3·1	0·3	0·0	−1·5	−1·5	−6·0
−0·8	Wattisham	4·5	2·5	0·0	−1·5	−2·5	−2·0	−7·0
−0·2	Honington	4·9	2·6	0·5	0·5	−1·5	−2·0	−6·7
−0·2	Bedford RAE	5·3	3·3	0·6	−0·8	−2·0	−1·5	−6·3
0·1	Birmingham AP	6·2	3·4	0·8	−1·9	−2·0	−0·5	−5·4
−0·2	Shawbury	6·1	3·8	0·1	−3·2	−2·8	0·1	−5·3
−0·1	Watnall	5·0	3·2	1·6	−0·9	−2·4	−1·3	−5·8
0·3	Coningsby	5·1	3·4	0·8	0·4	−2·2	−0·6	−5·1
−0·3	Binbrook	3·8	2·3	1·1	−0·5	−1·8	−1·2	−5·3
0·5	Boulmer	4·1	3·4	2·5	−0·3	−1·0	−1·4	−3·6
0·0	Leeming	4·9	2·9	2·5	−1·4	−2·4	−1·4	−4·8
0·6	Leeds WC	5·2	3·2	2·8	0·0	−1·3	−1·0	−4·8
0·7	Tynemouth	4·3	3·2	1·9	−0·3	−0·3	−0·7	−3·0
0·4	Finningley	6·0	3·6	2·0	−0·3	−2·3	−0·9	−5·0
0·3	Whitby CG	4·4	3·8	3·3	−2·4	−0·6	−2·1	−3·9
0·8	Aughton	6·2	3·6	1·1	−0·8	−0·6	0·5	−4·5
0·6	Blackpool AP	6·8	4·6	1·6	−2·5	−2·0	0·6	−4·6
1·2	Eskmeals	6·9	4·0	−0·3	0·3	−0·3	1·4	−3·6
0·8	Manchester AP	5·4	3·6	1·5	−1·0	0·3	0·5	−4·5
−0·2	Carlisle	5·4	2·5	−0·5	−2·0	−1·4	−0·4	−4·8
2·0	Aldergrove	5·0	3·9	−0·3	0·0	3·1	3·5	−0·8
1·9	Carrigans	4·7	3·3	0·0	0·1	3·3	3·5	−0·9
2·2	Carmoney	4·9	4·6	0·9	1·8	2·5	1·8	−0·8
1·5	Lisburn	5·1	3·5	−0·8	−0·1	0·6	3·7	−0·6

Minimum temperature week 2 (5 January 1987 to 11 January 1987)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Aberdeen AP	−0·2	0·8	1·3	−3·9	−7·8	−7·5	−5·6
Dumfries	4·6	1·3	−1·2	−6·7	−7·7	−3·5	−7·0
Edinburgh AP	1·1	1·6	−5·7	−7·6	−7·2	−6·2	−6·3
Eskdalemuir	1·8	0·6	−2·6	−9·8	−8·1	−4·1	−9·0
Fort William	2·0	0·8	−4·1	−7·8	−5·1	−3·7	−2·5
Glasgow AP	1·7	0·6	−5·5	−9·2	−5·0	−0·8	−4·3
Kinloss	0·7	0·9	0·9	−5·9	−7·2	−7·4	−6·0
Kirkwall	1·0	1·8	1·1	1·5	−0·8	0·3	−3·4
Lerwick	1·0	1·0	0·4	1·1	1·9	0·0	−3·1
Leuchars	0·6	1·8	−2·8	−6·8	−6·5	−4·1	−3·7
Machrihanish	2·8	4·1	−4·2	−2·4	−0·6	1·8	−2·0
Prestwick	2·9	2·1	−5·9	−6·2	−1·3	−0·2	−5·8
Stornoway	1·1	2·1	1·0	−0·7	2·0	−3·1	−2·7
Withorn	5·7	1·8	−3·0	−4·6	1·0	−0·3	−3·0
Wick	0·3	0·2	0·4	−2·9	−2·8	0·3	−1·6
Aberporth	5·2	5·1	−0·8	−1·2	−0·5	1·6	−4·4
Brawdy	5·5	4·3	−2·5	−2·8	−1·4	2·0	−4·2
Bristol	6·6	5·4	1·8	−2·8	−1·4	1·1	−5·0
Chivenor	6·9	5·8	−2·3	−3·2	−2·8	2·3	−3·7
Cilfynydd	5·0	2·5	−6·5	−4·6	−4·1	0·0	−5·9
Culdrose	6·9	4·5	−1·4	1·4	3·8	1·4	−0·2
Exeter	6·5	3·7	−2·4	−5·0	−3·5	0·8	−5·0
Lyneham	4·2	2·5	−1·5	−5·4	−5·3	−0·9	−8·3
Mumbles	6·4	4·6	0·5	0·9	1·6	2·9	−3·0
Okehampton	4·2	2·1	−3·8	−3·8	−2·2	0·3	−7·1
Rhoose	5·6	2·7	−2·3	−4·0	−3·4	0·7	−5·4

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
St. Mawgan	6·7	5·7	−2·2	−1·6	2·7	2·0	−2·8
Trawsfynydd	3·4	2·3	−2·2	−3·5	−3·5	−0·5	−6·2
Valley	6·1	5·5	−1·7	−2·8	−1·3	1·2	−4·4
Yeovilton	4·9	4·1	−3·4	−6·4	−6·2	0·7	−6·1
Brize Norton	4·2	2·7	−2·5	−5·8	−5·4	−1·1	−6·5
Boscombe Down	4·4	2·0	−2·4	−5·9	−4·5	0·0	−6·5
Bournemouth AP	5·0	3·3	−3·6	−6·9	−6·4	0·5	−6·1
Mount Batten	7·5	5·4	0·0	−1·2	1·5	1·2	−3·0
Easthampstead	5·0	2·7	−4·8	−6·3	−6·0	−0·9	−7·0
Gatwick AP	5·2	3·1	−1·5	−5·1	−2·8	−1·2	−5·7
Herstmonceux	5·5	0·7	−0·5	−4·0	−3·5	−1·4	−6·9
Manston	3·5	3·5	1·4	0·2	−4·7	−1·9	−5·4
Southampton WC	6·1	3·5	−0·5	−2·5	−1·9	1·0	−5·1
Heathrow AP	4·9	3·1	−1·4	−3·5	−2·8	−0·5	−5·7
Stansted	3·3	2·3	−2·8	−3·6	−6·3	−2·0	−7·7
Coltishall	2·1	2·6	0·2	−1·8	−5·8	−4·3	−5·8
Marham	2·3	1·7	−2·6	−4·5	−5·0	−2·0	−9·8
Wyton	4·1	1·1	−3·0	−2·5	−3·9	−2·0	−8·0
Wattisham	2·5	1·2	−2·4	−2·5	−5·3	−2·2	−9·0
Honington	2·9	1·2	−2·5	−1·8	−3·8	−2·2	−8·7
Bedford RAE	3·2	2·1	−2·1	−3·7	−4·8	−1·9	−8·6
Birmingham AP	4·4	2·0	−2·2	−6·8	−5·2	−1·3	−7·4
Shawbury	4·7	2·5	−3·5	−8·6	−7·2	−0·5	−6·9
Watnall	3·3	2·1	−0·6	−3·8	−5·8	−1·7	−6·8
Coningsby	3·0	2·1	−1·6	−2·1	−5·8	−1·4	−6·4
Binbrook	1·9	1·4	−0·8	−2·7	−4·2	−1·7	−6·2
Boulmer	2·1	2·5	1·2	−3·4	−4·4	−3·8	−5·0
Leeming	3·6	2·2	1·0	−5·4	−5·2	−3·0	−5·4
Leeds WC	3·6	2·1	1·2	−3·4	−3·5	−1·9	−5·8
Tynemouth	3·0	2·6	0·3	−2·3	−3·4	−3·0	−4·0
Finningley	4·5	2·6	−0·1	−5·0	−5·5	−2·0	−6·1
Whitby CG	2·6	2·3	1·2	−2·0	−4·3	−4·8	−5·0
Aughton	5·5	2·4	−0·5	−2·6	−2·8	0·0	−5·8
Blackpool AP	6·1	3·7	−0·6	−6·6	−6·4	−0·1	−6·5
Eskmeals	6·7	3·2	−5·2	−4·2	−3·4	1·1	−5·6
Manchester AP	4·3	2·4	−1·0	−4·0	−2·5	0·4	−5·6
Carlisle	5·0	1·0	−3·5	−6·1	−5·4	−2·4	−6·5
Aldergrove	3·4	2·3	−5·3	−4·7	0·7	3·1	−1·2
Carrigans	2·8	1·0	−3·5	−3·9	0·9	2·1	−1·5
Carmoney	3·0	3·5	−1·2	−1·0	0·2	−0·4	−1·4
Lisburn	3·8	1·0	−6·0	−6·0	−4·0	3·4	−1·0

Week 3 (12 January 1987 to 18 January 1987)

Daily mean value

Weekly means	Local office name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
−1·0	Aberdeen AP	−4·6	−4·0	−1·6	0·3	2·0	0·4	0·3
T −1·9	Dumfries	−6·5	−5·3	−2·3	0·3	1·3	0·0	−0·8
−1·3	Edinburgh AP	−6·1	−3·1	−1·5	0·5	1·8	−0·3	−0·5
T −3·4	Eskdalemuir	−7·8	−6·0	−4·3	−1·1	0·1	−2·0	−2·4
−1·3	Fort William	−6·8	−6·3	−3·8	−6·3	2·5	1·3	4·3
−1·2	Glasgow AP	−5·9	−4·5	−2·0	0·0	1·8	1·0	1·3
T −2·1	Kinloss	−7·4	−5·3	−4·6	−1·3	0·3	0·6	2·8
0·5	Kirkwall	−2·3	−1·0	−0·5	1·0	2·0	2·2	2·4
0·5	Lerwick	−2·5	−0·3	−0·3	0·1	1·3	2·1	3·3
−0·7	Leuchars	−3·8	−2·4	−1·5	1·2	2·1	0·6	−0·9
0·4	Machrihanish	−3·6	−2·9	−1·3	0·8	2·2	3·0	4·3
T −1·6	Prestwick	−6·8	−4·8	−2·6	0·1	1·3	−0·3	1·8
1·8	Stornoway	−2·0	0·5	0·3	1·4	2·9	4·1	5·6
−1·0	Whithorn	−5·2	−3·8	−1·9	−0·2	1·5	1·3	1·0
0·9	Wick	−2·6	−1·1	0·4	1·8	2·5	2·5	2·6
T −2·3	Aberpforth	−6·6	−5·4	−2·4	−1·5	0·3	−0·6	0·0
T −2·2	Brawdy	−6·8	−6·5	−3·4	−1·9	0·3	1·3	1·7
T −2·6	Bristol	−6·6	−6·3	−3·7	−1·9	1·0	−0·5	0·0
T −1·9	Chivenor	−5·1	−4·5	−2·6	−1·6	1·1	−0·7	0·3
T −3·7	Cilfyndd	−8·3	−8·1	−5·1	−3·6	−0·6	2·1	−2·3
T −2·4	Culdrose	−5·0	−7·7	−5·0	−2·3	0·1	0·9	2·3
T −2·8	Exeter	−6·9	−6·3	−4·8	−2·4	0·7	−0·3	0·6
T −4·6	Lyneham	−9·3	−8·9	−5·8	−3·8	−0·8	−2·1	−1·5
T −1·8	Mumbles	−5·3	−5·9	−2·5	−1·3	1·1	0·7	0·6
T −5·2	Okehampton	−9·8	−9·1	−6·7	−2·4	−2·3	−2·4	−0·6
T −3·2	Rhoose	−7·3	−7·0	−3·8	−2·6	0·4	−1·3	−0·8
T −2·2	St. Mawgan	−5·8	−5·8	−4·2	−2·1	0·5	0·8	1·6
T −3·2	Trawsfynydd	−7·9	−6·6	−3·5	−2·0	−1·9	−0·1	0·0

Weekly means	Local office name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
-0·9	Valley	-5·1	-4·3	-1·6	-0·1	1·4	1·2	2·4
T -3·3	Yeovilton	-7·3	-7·0	-5·8	-2·7	0·6	-0·4	-0·6
T -4·1	Brize Norton	-8·5	-7·4	-5·1	-2·9	-0·4	-2·4	-1·9
T -4·1	Boscombe Down	-8·4	-7·4	-5·1	-3·4	-0·6	-1·8	-1·6
T -3·3	Bournemouth AP	-7·8	-6·9	-4·9	-2·8	0·0	-0·7	-0·4
T -1·8	Mount Batten	-5·5	-5·5	-3·4	-1·9	0·8	1·4	1·7
T -4·5	Easthampstead	-10·1	-8·8	-5·0	-2·9	-0·6	-1·8	-2·2
T -4·2	Gatwick AP	-8·8	-7·4	-4·9	-2·1	-1·2	-2·8	-2·4
T -4·7	Herstmonceux	-10·0	-8·6	-5·8	-2·2	-1·0	-2·8	-2·8
T -3·7	Manston	-6·8	-6·1	-4·1	-2·0	-1·7	-2·9	-2·4
T -3·1	Southampton WC	-7·0	-6·4	-4·8	-2·3	0·1	-0·6	-0·4
T -3·5	Heathrow AP	-7·5	-6·2	-4·7	-2·3	-0·5	-1·4	-1·6
T -4·3	Stansted	-9·2	-7·4	-5·1	-2·5	-1·0	-2·1	-2·6
T -3·0	Coltishall	-6·3	-6·6	-3·6	-2·4	0·3	-1·1	-1·3
T -4·1	Marham	-10·4	-8·5	-3·5	-2·3	-0·1	-2·6	-1·6
T -4·5	Wyton	-9·0	-9·0	-4·1	-2·4	-0·7	-3·8	-2·2
T -4·1	Wattisham	-9·2	-7·3	-4·6	-2·9	-1·0	-1·6	-1·9
T -4·3	Honington	-9·6	-8·6	-4·2	-2·5	-0·1	-3·5	-1·7
T -5·2	Bedford RAE	-9·6	-8·8	-4·4	-3·1	-3·3	-4·4	-2·8
T -4·8	Birmingham AP	-7·4	-8·9	-3·4	-2·3	-0·3	-5·8	-5·0
T -4·3	Shawbury	-9·0	-8·4	-3·0	-1·9	0·6	-4·9	-3·4
T -4·0	Watnall	-7·6	-8·8	-3·4	-2·4	-0·5	-1·8	-3·3
T -3·0	Coningsby	-7·0	-7·3	-2·4	-1·4	0·6	-1·7	-1·9
T -3·3	Binbrook	-6·5	-7·7	-3·5	-1·3	0·1	-1·4	-2·6
-0·9	Boulmer	-3·8	-3·3	-1·2	1·1	2·4	0·6	-2·0
T -2·5	Leeming	-7·1	-5·0	-2·3	-0·3	0·7	-0·1	-2·4
T -2·3	Leeds WC	-6·4	-4·5	-3·0	-0·4	0·5	0·0	-2·3
-0·5	Tynemouth	-3·1	-2·6	-0·8	1·2	2·1	1·3	-1·6
T -2·8	Finningley	-7·4	-6·6	-2·3	-0·6	0·4	-0·8	-2·5
T -1·7	Whitby CG	-4·3	-4·1	-2·5	0·7	0·5	0·3	-2·4
T -2·5	Aughton	-6·8	-5·5	-2·7	-0·6	0·9	-0·9	-2·0
T -2·1	Blackpool AP	-6·6	-4·6	-1·8	0·0	1·0	-0·8	-1·8
-1·2	Eskmeals	-5·8	-4·1	-1·8	0·4	2·1	0·4	0·4
T -2·6	Manchester AP	-6·8	-5·3	-2·4	-0·9	0·6	-0·9	-2·5
T -2·1	Carlisle	-6·1	-5·6	-2·8	0·1	1·6	0·1	-1·7
0·0	Aldergrove	-4·5	-4·0	-1·1	0·5	1·7	3·7	4·0
-0·6	Carrigans	-4·5	-5·3	-2·2	-0·3	1·4	2·6	3·4
-0·2	Carmoney	-4·1	-3·8	-1·5	0·2	1·0	3·2	3·3
0·3	Lisburn	-4·0	-3·5	-1·0	0·3	2·1	4·1	4·5

Minimum temperature week 3 (12 January 1987 to 18 January 1987)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Aberdeen AP	-6·4	-6·8	-4·6	-1·8	0·8	0·0	-0·8
Dumfries	-9·0	-9·8	-6·1	-1·8	0·2	-1·1	-2·1
Edinburgh AP	-9·3	-6·8	-5·1	-1·4	1·0	-1·4	-2·6
Eskdalemuir	-9·6	-9·1	-8·6	-3·0	-0·5	-2·7	-4·5
Fort William	-9·7	-10·2	-9·0	-4·0	1·0	-1·8	1·4
Glasgow AP	-10·0	-7·9	-6·9	-2·3	0·8	-2·4	0·8
Kinloss	-10·9	-11·5	-9·0	-4·4	-2·1	-2·0	-0·1
Kirkwall	-3·7	-4·5	-3·5	-0·9	0·4	1·4	0·9
Lerwick	-3·7	-4·1	-2·8	-2·8	-1·1	0·0	2·0
Leuchars	-5·5	-5·4	-5·6	-0·9	1·1	-0·5	-3·4
Machrihanish	-4·3	-5·4	-4·6	-1·3	1·6	1·8	2·0
Prestwick	-10·0	-7·9	-6·9	-2·3	0·8	-2·4	0·8
Stornoway	-3·3	-3·3	-2·1	-1·1	1·5	1·2	3·7
Withorn	-6·4	-6·5	-5·1	-2·5	0·6	0·5	0·0
Wick	-4·1	-5·2	-2·3	-0·5	1·1	1·3	1·0
Aberporth	-8·5	-8·5	-4·8	-4·0	-0·4	-3·1	-1·9
Brawdy	-8·9	-10·7	-6·6	-4·5	-0·4	-0·8	0·3
Bristol	-8·6	-9·6	-7·8	-5·4	-0·2	-2·3	-1·3
Chivenor	-6·5	-6·9	-6·0	-5·6	0·3	-3·5	-2·3
Clifynydd	-8·9	-10·7	-9·0	-7·2	-1·8	-7·0	-4·3
Culdrose	-5·0	-10·9	-8·8	-5·6	-2·4	-2·7	-1·7
Exeter	-9·0	-9·1	-9·2	-6·0	-0·7	-3·4	-1·4
Lyneham	-11·5	-13·2	-10·3	-7·4	-2·3	-3·1	-2·6
Mumbles	-6·3	-8·6	-5·7	-4·9	0·1	-0·2	-0·5
Okehampton	-11·2	-11·6	-10·1	-8·8	-3·4	-5·4	-2·8
Rhoose	-8·7	-10·3	-7·4	-6·5	-0·6	-3·0	-2·6
St. Mawgan	-7·9	-9·0	-7·7	-5·2	-0·7	-3·3	-0·3
Trawsfynydd	-10·4	-9·9	-6·6	-4·5	-4·4	-1·8	-1·6
Valley	-7·5	-7·2	-4·5	-2·7	0·5	-1·6	0·6
Yeovilton	-9·7	-11·2	-11·3	-6·7	-1·0	-1·5	-2·0
Brize Norton	-10·8	-10·9	-9·3	-6·6	-1·7	-3·7	-2·9
Boscombe Down	-9·8	-10·4	-8·8	-6·9	-2·0	-2·2	-2·7

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bournemouth AP	−10·7	−9·8	−8·6	−6·1	−1·9	−1·3	−1·5
Mount Batten	−7·1	−8·4	−6·9	−5·4	−0·6	−2·0	0·3
Easthampstead	−13·2	−13·4	−8·0	−6·4	−2·3	−2·0	−3·0
Gatwick AP	−10·7	−10·3	−7·9	−4·5	−2·8	−3·7	−3·2
Herstmonceux	−12·4	−12·2	−9·5	−5·3	−2·2	−3·7	−3·5
Manston	−8·9	−8·5	−6·3	−4·3	−2·8	−3·9	−3·9
Southampton WC	−8·9	−8·9	−8·3	−5·7	−1·8	−1·1	−1·3
Heathrow AP	−8·9	−9·1	−8·0	−5·7	−2·6	−1·5	−2·5
Stansted	−10·5	−10·4	−8·0	−5·5	−2·6	−2·4	−3·4
Coltishall	−8·1	−9·3	−6·6	−6·5	−1·0	−1·9	−1·9
Marham	−14·8	−12·8	−6·4	−6·0	−1·6	−4·1	−2·3
Wyton	−11·6	−13·8	−7·1	−5·5	−2·6	−6·1	−3·2
Wattisham	−11·9	−9·8	−7·2	−6·3	−2·5	−2·6	−2·5
Honington	−12·8	−12·7	−6·8	−6·0	−1·3	−5·7	−2·2
Bedford RAE	−12·1	−12·8	−7·4	−6·1	−7·0	−7·1	−3·5
Birmingham AP	−9·7	−13·2	−6·2	−5·4	−1·1	−9·8	−8·3
Shawbury	−12·7	−13·1	−6·2	−4·9	−0·5	−8·8	−6·3
Watnall	−9·6	−13·3	−6·0	−5·1	−1·3	−2·2	−4·2
Coningsby	−9·7	−11·5	−5·0	−4·3	−0·2	−2·2	−2·5
Binbrook	−8·4	−11·8	−6·7	−3·9	−0·6	−1·4	−3·2
Boulmer	−5·5	−6·6	−4·9	−1·2	1·6	0·2	−2·7
Leeming	−10·2	−10·2	−5·5	−2·4	0·1	−0·5	−2·7
Leeds WC	−7·9	−7·3	−6·6	−2·2	−0·2	−0·1	−2·6
Tynemouth	−4·9	−5·0	−4·2	−1·1	1·5	1·0	−2·6
Finningley	−10·4	−11·0	−5·0	−2·8	−0·4	−0·9	−3·2
Whitby CG	−6·4	−7·4	−6·0	−1·0	−0·9	0·0	−3·1
Aughton	−8·9	−8·8	−5·8	−2·5	0·3	−2·1	−3·5
Blackpool AP	−9·0	−7·8	−4·7	−2·1	0·3	−1·9	−3·6
Eskmeals	−8·1	−6·9	−5·0	−1·8	1·2	−0·6	−0·9
Manchester AP	−8·7	−7·8	−5·1	−3·3	−0·2	−1·8	−4·7
Carlisle	−7·5	−9·8	−7·2	−2·0	1·0	−0·8	−4·5
Aldergrove	−6·0	−6·9	−4·3	−1·7	1·1	1·5	1·6
Carrigans	−6·5	−8·5	−6·1	−3·0	0·7	0·1	0·2
Carmoney	−6·0	−7·0	−4·8	−1·6	0·0	0·4	−0·4
Lisbury	−5·2	−6·6	−3·8	−1·7	1·2	1·9	2·0

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 23 January 1987

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is available to him regarding the mechanisms used by universities and polytechnics to measure the demand for graduates of particular subjects in universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Dunn: The main statistical information about the employment of graduates is derived from the first destination surveys of recent graduates undertaken annually by universities and polytechnics. For some employment (including teaching, medicine and veterinary science) there are national assessments of prospective demand, of which higher education institutions are informed. Careers advisers and academic staff in institutions of higher education have a wide range of contacts with potential employers locally and nationally, covering both the demand for graduates and the content of courses.

Education Officers

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action his Department takes to improve the training and professional skills of chief education officers and education officers in local education authorities; and what is the current annual expenditure on such programmes.

Mr. Dunn: The Department of Education and Science has no direct responsibility for the training of local education authority officers. Nationally co-ordinated management training courses are provided by the Society of Education Officers.

Human Embryo Research

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will direct the Medical Research Council, under section 2(1) of the Science and Technology Act 1965, to discontinue human embryo research.

Mr. Dunn: No. The Government's consultation document "Legislation on Human Infertility Services and Embryo Research" (Cmnd. 46, December 1986) invites views about those issues on which the Warnock committee thought legislation was necessary or desirable. This will assist the preparation of legislation for introduction in the next Parliament. At that time it is proposed to offer alternative draft clauses on embryo research to assist Parliament in resolving this matter on a free vote.

Home Education

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children are being educated out of school and in the home.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what provision exists for the adequate supervision of those educated out of school and in the home;

(2) what guidance his Department has issued to local education authorities about how they should ensure that those educated at home are receiving adequate education;

(3) what guidance his Department has issued to local education authorities about the action to be taken by a local education authority when evidence of inadequate education at home is brought to its notice;

(4) what action is taken by his Department to monitor the performances of local education authorities in the supervision of children's education at home;

(5) what guidance the Department has issued to local education authorities about the criteria to be used in assessing the quality of education given in the home and to satisfy themselves that the parents are suitable persons to educate their children out of school and in the home;

(6) what arrangements exist when children who are educated at home leave the local education authority area for another; what steps are taken to ensure that the subsequent local education authority is aware that children being educated at home have moved to its area; and how these children are then to be academically assessed.

Mr. Dunn: Each local education authority has a duty under section 37 of the Education Act 1944 (as amended) to satisfy itself that the parents of a child of compulsory school age belonging to its area, whether newly arrived or otherwise, are fulfilling their duty under section 36 to ensure that he receives efficient full-time education suited to his age, ability and aptitude, by attending school or otherwise. There is no difference in the criteria for assessing school or home tuition. If necessary, authorities can enforce this duty on parents by school attendance order proceedings under section 37. These duties are straight-forward and, as for many others under the Education Acts, no need is seen for either particular guidance or the monitoring of authorities' performance. However, if my right honourable Friend were to find that an authority had failed to discharge its duty, he could issue a corrective direction under section 99 of the 1944 Act.

Examination Results

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what means are used to ensure that examination results at A and O-level in England and Wales are comparable between examining boards;

(2) what research his Department has undertaken into the disparity between the examination results at A and O-level of entrants of the different examining boards in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The GCE boards bear the main responsibility for ensuring comparability of the standards required for the award of particular grades at O and A-level. They are concerned to maintain the standards of their examinations and have undertaken considerable research.

The Department of Education and Science has undertaken no research in this area. However, the Secondary Examination Council (SEC) has been specifically charged with responsibility for monitoring the comparability of examination standards, and currently

scrutinises A-levels for fairness and reliability. The SEC will undertake similar work in respect of GCSE examinations which will supersede O-levels and CS in 1988.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of entrants for A-level examinations of each of the examining boards in England and Wales in each year since 1983 have received *(a)* A grades, *(b)* B grades, *(c)* C grades, *(d)* D grades and *(e)* E grades.

Mr. Dunn: I shall reply as soon as possible with data for the English boards. Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing local authority capital allocations in respect of schools for each year since 1978-79, in cash terms, and in 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing departmental outturn expenditure on schools in each year since 1978-79, broken down between *(a)* teachers' pay and *(b)* all other costs, in cash terms and in 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The table contains the information. The figures for expenditure include that of central, as well as of local, government; the figures for teacher pay cover nursery, primary, scondary and special schools maintained by local education authorities.

Year	*Total Expenditure on Schools*		*Teachers' Pay*		*All Other Costs*	
	£ million Cash	*£ million Real Terms*	*£ million Cash*	*£ million Real Terms*	*£ million Cash*	*£ million Real Terms*
1978-79	4,836	4,836	2,709	2,709	2,127	2,127
1979-80	5,496	4,703	3,066	2,624	2,430	2,079
1980-81	6,661	4,805	3,880	2,799	2,781	2,006
1981-82	7,203	4,729	4,302	2,824	2,901	1,905
1982-83	7,649	4,683	4,550	2,786	3,099	1,897
1983-84	8,013	4,695	4,751	2,784	3,262	1,911
1984-85	8,285	4,656	4,946	2,780	3,339	1,876

Notes:
1. The cash terms for all the later years have been repriced to 1978-79 prices using the Gross Domestic Product (Market Prices) Deflator.
2. Teachers' Pay includes allowances plus the employers' contribution towards national insurance and superannuation.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing outturn capital expenditure on schools in each year since 1978-79 *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of total departmental outturn expenditure on schools and *(c)* in 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is set out in the table. The figures for capital expenditure are for all maintained schools in England. They comprise expenditure by local authorities and the total value of grant-aided work at voluntary aided and special agreement schools, including the governors's contribution of 15 per cent. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that over this period the number of maintained, schools in England fell from 28,000 to 25,000.

Gross Outturn Capital Expenditure[1] on Maintained Schools in England

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
(a) in cash terms (£ million)	304	347	410	336	346	364	393	409
(b) as a percentage of total departmental outturn expenditure[2] on schools.	6·9	6·9	6·6	4·5	4·4	4·4	4·6	4·6
(c) in 1978-79 prices[3] (£ million)	304	297	296	221	212	213	221	217

[1] The grant-aided work at voluntary schools includes expenditure on repairs and maintenance.
[2] gross of receipts.
[3] using the GDP (market prices) deflator.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what were the totals of capital expenditure forecasts supplied to his Department by local authorities in respect of 1986-87 preparatory to his determination of capital allocations for that year for *(a)* basic need school places, *(b)* new schemes relating to sub-standard school places, *(c)* expenditure committed on schemes arising before 1986-87 and *(d)* all other school schemes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the totals of capital expenditure forecasts supplied to his Department by local authorities in respect of 1987-88 preparatory to his determination of capital allocations for that year for *(a)* basic need school places, *(b)* new schemes relating to sub-standard school places, *(c)* expenditure committed on schemes arising before 1987-88 and *(d)* all other school schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The following totals are taken from the cash plans supplied by local education authorities

to my Department in relation to all maintained schools. They comprise LEA planned capital expenditure and the total value of capital projects on which grant aid was sought by the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools.

£ thousands

	1986-87	*1987-88*
(a) new basic need projects:	36,884	59,512
(b) new improvement or replacement projects:	134,363	168,375
(c) committed expenditure:	222,865	243,351
(d) all other schemes:	158,926	181,855

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what amounts of outturn capital expenditure by local authorities in 1986-87 is estimated to have been spent on *(a)* basic need school places, *(b)* new schemes relating to sub-standard school places, *(c)* expenditure committed on schemes arising before 1986-87 and *(d)* all other school schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Total capital expenditure on education by local authorities in 1986-87 is forecast to be £529 million in England. More detailed information for 1986-87 is not yet available.

Universities (Academic Pay)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about resources for academic pay in the universities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: When I announced planned provision for the universities in November I said the Government would be willing to provide some further additional funding for academic pay restructuring if structural improvements could be agreed at a cost that could be afforded (*Official Report*, c. 490). I thus recognised that extra provision would probably need to be made available. Negotiations had not reached the stage at which it was appropriate to include specific figures in the autumn statement or the public expenditure White Paper.

I am today informing the University Grants Committee that these additional resources will be £40 million in 1987-88, £56 million in 1988-89 and £71 million in 1989-90. These additions will be contained within the overall public expenditure planning totals already published in the Government's expenditure plans 1987-88 to 1989-90 (Cm. 56).

There will be no increase in these figures. Moreover, these sums will only actually be added to existing provision for university recurrent grant if and when:

a satisfactory new pay structure is assured, providing management with more flexibility to take account of the quality of lecturers' performance and recruitment and retention problems; and

there is a firm commitment to improved promotion, probation and performance appraisal arrangements.

Higher Education

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of first year students in public sector higher education in England and Wales for each of the last five years for which figures are available, as compared with the number of first year students in the universities over the same period, and divided into the subject classification utilised by the University Grants Committee and National Advisory Body, respectively.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The information is shown in the following table. University figures for 1985 are not yet available. Public sector higher education in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Full-time and sandwich first year students at universities in Great Britain postgraduate, first degree and other advanced courses

(thousands)

Academic year beginning in	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Subject of study				
Education	10·0	8·9	9·0	9·1
Medicine, dentistry and health	8·0	8·5	8·7	8·1
Engineering and technology	15·9	15·5	15·5	15·6
Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science	2·1	2·1	2·0	2·0
Biological and physical sciences	25·0	25·2	24·9	25·6
Administrative, business and social studies	26·5	26·0	26·3	27·8
Architecture and other professional and vocational subjects	2·2	2·2	2·3	2·4
Language, literature and area studies	11·6	11·2	11·1	11·5
Arts other than languages	9·2	8·9	8·7	9·0
Total—All subjects	110·6	108·4	108·4	111·5

Total Full Time Year Students At Public Sector Higher Education (England)

Thousands

Academic Year Beginning in	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
NAB Programme					
Engineering	8·5	9·2	9·3	9·9	10·3
Other Technology & Light Manufacture	1·1	1·3	1·6	1·3	1·4
Construction & Building	5·8	6·0	6·1	6·0	5·7
Science	3·7	4·3	4·4	4·4	4·7
Environmental & Other Sciences	6·1	6·3	6·0	6·8	6·7
Agriculture	0·7	0·7	0·7	0·8	0·8
Ancillary Health	3·0	3·2	3·3	3·4	3·4
Mathematics & Computing	3·7	3·9	4·8	5·3	5·8

Academic Year Beginning in	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Business, Management & Accountancy	16·6	16·1	16·5	16·9	17·4
Catering & Home Economics	2·3	2·5	2·2	2·3	2·5
Other professional & Vocational Subjects	2·4	2·4	2·6	2·6	2·4
Social & Administrative Studies	9·3	9·6	9·4	9·4	9·5
Languages	1·6	1·7	1·5	1·7	2·0
Humanities	8·0	8·1	7·6	5·8	6·3
Art	2·2	2·7	2·8	2·7	2·9
Design	4·0	5·4	6·1	6·2	6·6
Performing Arts	2·0	2·1	2·3	2·3	2·4
Initial Teacher Training	13·2	12·4	11·6	11·7	11·7
In-service Teacher Training	2·3	2·2	2·5	2·9	2·9
TOTAL-ALL SUBJECTS	96·6	100·3	101·2	102·5	105·4

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of higher education students in *(a)* Great Britain as a whole and *(b)* England and Wales in the academic years 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85, together with the best estimates for 1985-86, and divided into the figures for universities and public sector, the latter split into the figures for polytechnics and other colleges.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 December 1986, c. *389-90*]: The available information is given in the following table.

Student numbers in higher education

Thousands

Academic Year Beginning in	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
GREAT BRITAIN					
Full-Time					
University	300·2	295·4	291·7	290·6	[3]291
Polytechnic	133·7	142·4	151·9	156·3	159·3
Other PSHE[2]	108·2	115·6	121·9	126·1	129·3
Total PSHE	241·8	258·0	273·8	282·4	288·5
Total higher education	542·0	553·4	565·5	573·0	[3]579·0
Part Time					
University [1]	104·2	108·0	110·9	113·3	[3]114·0
Polytechnic	66·7	66·1	68·8	69·2	73·0
Other PSHE[2]	126·2	128·5	132·0	130·0	141·8
Total PSHE	192·9	194·6	200·8	199·2	214·8
Total higher education[1]	297·1	302·6	311·7	312·6	[3]329·0
ENGLAND AND WALES					
Full-Time					
University	255·2	250·6	246·9	245·3	[3]245·0
Polytechnic	133·7	142·4	151·9	156·3	159·3
Other PSHE	79·0	84·9	89·6	93·3	95·1
Total PSHE	212·6	227·3	241·5	249·7	254·4
Total higher education	467·9	477·9	488·4	495·0	[3]499·0
Part-Time					
University[1]	100·0	103·6	106·0	107·9	[3]108·0
Polytechnic	66·7	66·1	68·8	69·2	73·0
Other PSHE	104·0	106·6	109·8	109·2	119·7
Total PSHE	170·7	172·7	178·6	178·4	192·7
Total higher education [1]	270·8	276·4	284·6	286·3	[3]301·0

[1] Including the Open University.
[2] Including Scottish Central Institutions.
[3] Provisional.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is going to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Newham, North-East of 23 December 1986 about Michael Hicks.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend wrote yesterday to the hon. Member.

Radioactivity Accidents

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to what training the Gwent constabulary have received to deal with accidents involving radioactivity; whether the divisions of that force carry out regular exercises to deal with such accidents; and at what intervals such exercises take place;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gloucestershire as to what training the constabulary

have received to deal with accidents involving radioactivity; whether the divisions of that force carry out regular exercises to deal with such accidents; and at what intervals such exercises take place;

(3) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gloucestershire as to what items of equipment are available for police use in an accident involving radioactive contamination in the Gloucestershire constabulary area listing the number of (i) dosimeters, (ii) radiac survey meters, (iii) sets of protective clothing, (iv) breathing units and (v) de-contamination units;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to what items of equipment are available for police use in an accident involving radioactive contamination in the Gwent constabulary area listing the number of (i) dosimeters, (ii) radiac survey meters, (iii) sets of protective clothing, (iv) breathing units and (v) de-contamination units.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Officers of Gloucestershire and Gwent constabularies are trained in the effect of radioactivity during initial training with a refresher course every three years. Both forces have contingency plans for dealing with major incidents, including incidents involving radioactivity, which are exercised at least once a year. Gloucestershire police force holds 14 dosimeters and 338 radiac survey meters (PDRM82s), and Gwent 16 and 184 respectively. Further equipment and professional advice is available as set out in the Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities. A copy is in the Library.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes have been established *(a)* in Wales, *(b)* in South Wales, *(c)* in Cardiff and *(d)* in Cardiff, West; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are currently 1,342 neighbourhood watch schemes in Wales. Of these, 463 are in the South Wales constabulary area including 54 in Cardiff of which 23 are in the police sub-division which covers the Cardiff, West constituency. We are encouraged by the involvement of the community in crime prevention indicated by the increase in the number of schemes in Wales during the last 12 months.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage increase in burglaries in Cardiff to the last available figure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The figures collected centrally relate to police force areas and are published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (table 2.5 of the issue for 1985, Cmnd. 10). In the 12 months ending 30 September 1986 the South Wales police recorded 2 per cent. fewer offences of burglary than in the preceding 12 months.

National Emergencies (Safety)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he takes to ensure that local authorities provide for the safety of people in the event of a national emergency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Home Office issues the Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities, a copy of which is in the Library, and ensures by means of monitoring that requirements within our area of responsibility are met.

Society for the Protection of Unborn Children

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the progress of the inquiry into the incident at the offices of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children on Friday 15 February 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner that although the inquiry is still open, lack of evidence and problems over identification mean that there is little prospect of any prosecutions being brought.

Bilingual Penalty Tickets

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *336*, if he will list those practical difficulties involved in producing and using convenient bilingual versions of forms used under part III of the Transport Act 1982.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A substantial amount of information needs to be included in a fixed penalty notice for it to conform to the law, and the forms need to be produced in a format in which they can reasonably be carried by police officers in their tunic or shirt pocket. It would be difficult to produce bilingual forms which meet both these requirements.

Stop and Search

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the stop and search frequency and subsequent arrests and charging for September 1983, September 1984, September 1985 and September 1986 for the Highbury vale, Holloway, Upper street, City road and Kings Cross areas of Islington (N Division) of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 2 December 1986, c. *574*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the readily available information is as given in the table. This revises some of the figures given in the *Official Report* at column *632* which I regret were incorrect. The table shows for 1982, 1983 and 1984 the number of persons or vehicles recorded as stopped; statistics showing the number of occasions on which a search was conducted are not available. Up to 1 April 1985, the information was collated on an annual basis and figures for the first quarter of 1985 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. From 1 April 1985, the Metropolitan police introduced a new code of practice relating to stop and search procedures and the information collected in line with sections 5 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, relates only to those occasions on which persons or vehicles were searched. The figures are therefore not comparable with those for earlier years. Monthly figures for such small areas are very variable, and have therefore been aggregated to provide

quarterly totals. Figures for the third quarter are not available. Information on whether charges resulted from these arrests is not available.

Stops, searches[1] and resultant arrests: 'N' Division, Metropolitan police

Number

	Holloway and Highbury Vale	*Kings Cross*	*Islington*	*'N' District Total*
Stops of persons or vehicles[2] [3]				
1982	11,000	8,100	7,300	26,400
1983	15,400	7,400	5,300	28,100
1984	10,800	3,300	3,800	17,900
Arrests resulting from stops[2]				
1982	2,100	400	500	3,000
1983	2,500	700	400	3,600
1984	2,100	600	600	3,300
Searches of persons or vehicles[3]				
2nd quarter 1985	272	81	56	409
3rd quarter 1985	199	33	43	275
4th quarter 1985	127	14	55	196
1st quarter 1986	163	67	82	312
2nd quarter 1986	124	41	43	208
Arrests resulting from Searches				
2nd quarter 1985	69	18	6	93
3rd quarter 1985	36	4	3	43
4th quarter 1985	14	3	23	40
1st quarter 1986	29	5	8	42
2nd quarter 1986	32	3	7	42

[1] The basis of recording changed on 1 April 1985.

[2] The figures are rounded because they are based on information in station registers for operational purposes and as this form of recording is unsuitable for the preparation of statistical summaries, the resultant figures may be subject to some error. Components may not add to the total because they have been rounded independently.

[3] Some of the figures on stops and searches have been revised and differ from those shown at column 632, vol. 101, part II.

Transport International Routier

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries that are signatories to the 1949 Transport International Routier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

The provisions of an international agreement signed at Geneva on 16 June 1949 relating to the international transport of goods by road were terminated on 1 January 1965.

A later customs convention on the international transport of goods by road (TIR carnets) signed at Geneva on 15 January 1959 was terminated and replaced by the present convention: the customs convention on the international transport of goods under cover of TIR carnets (TIR convention), signed at Geneva on 14 November 1975. The list of signatories (and accessions) to this convention (as at 31 December 1985) is as follows.

Participant	*Signature*	*Date*
Afghanistan		[4] 23 September 1982
Albania		[4] 4 January 1985
Austria	27 April 1976	13 May 1977
Belgium	22 December 1976	20 December 1982
Bulgaria		[4] 20 October 1977
Canada		[4] 21 October 1980
Chile		[4] 6 October 1982
Czechslovakia		[4] 25 February 1981
Cyprus		[4] 7 August 1981
Denmark	21 December 1976	20 December 1982
European Economic Community	30 December 1976	[3] 20 December 1982
Finland	28 December 1976	27 February 1978
France		[1] 30 December 1976
German Democratic Republic		[4] 21 July 1978
Germany, Federal Republic of	30 December 1976	20 December 1982
Greece	30 December 1976	15 May 1980
Hungary	23 November 1976	9 March 1978
Iran (Islamic Republic of)		[4] 16 August 1984
Ireland	30 December 1976	20 December 1982
Israel		[4] 14 February 1984
Italy	28 December 1976	20 December 1982
Jordan		[4] 24 December 1985
Kuwait		[4] 23 November 1983
Liechtenstein		
Luxembourg	23 December 1976	20 December 1982
Malta		[4] 18 February 1977
Morocco	15 October 1976	31 March 1983
Netherlands	28 December 1976	[2] 20 December 1982
Norway		[4] 11 January 1980
Poland		[4] 23 December 1980
Portugal		[4] 13 February 1979
Republic of Korea		[4] 29 January 1982
Romania		[4] 14 February 1980
Spain		[4] 11 August 1982
Sweden		[1] 17 December 1976
Switzerland	4 August 1976	3 February 1978
Tunisia	11 June 1976	13 October 1977
Turkey		[4] 12 November 1984
United Kingdom	22 December 1976	8 October 1982
USSR		[4] 8 June 1982

Participant	Signature	Date
United States of America		[4] 18 September 1981
Uruguay		[4] 24 December 1980
Yugoslavia	28 April 1976	20 September 1977

[1] Definitive signature.
[2] Ratification acceptance.
[3] Approval.
[4] Accession.

London (Homeless Persons)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will, as a matter of urgency, in conjunction with the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Islington and Camden, make available the facilities of the civil defence bunkers at Clapham common, Clapham north, Clapham south and Stockwell underground stations for the immediate shelter of the homeless in inner city London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

These facilities are the so-called deep tube shelters at Clapham Common, Clapham North, Clapham South and Stockwell. Those at Clapham South and Stockwell have been let commercially for storage purposes on long leases and are not therefore available. Those at Clapham North and Clapham Common are disused and are not in a fit state for habitation.

The Property Services Agency would be ready to consider an approach from a local housing authority, or other appropriate housing agency, regarding the feasibility of adaption and the possibility of leasing such facilities to them for such purposes.

However, the first priority must be to make the best use of local authority stock. In April 1986, 6,546 local authority dwellings in these four boroughs were empty; more than 2,132 had been empty for over a year.

Radiation

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy relating to the issue of potassium iodate tablets for use against iodine 131 resulting from a nuclear accident.

Mrs. Currie: I have been asked to reply.

Government plans in the event of a United Kingdom accident are outlined in the Health and Safety Executive booklet "Emergency Plans for Nuclear Installations". The plans provide for the issue of potassium iodate tablets for people within a distance of 2 to 3 kilometres downwind of the site of a release of radioactivity. Medical advice to the Government indicates that 200 mg of iodine is appropriate for use pending evacuation of those concerned. A further dose of 100 mg per day is advised if exposure continues because evacuation is thought unnecessary or inappropriate.

Electoral Areas

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the 30 English non-metropolitan districts which have shown the greatest percentage reduction in electorate since 1981, giving the percentage and actual figure in each case.

Mrs. Currie: I have been asked to reply.

There are not 30 but 17 English non-metropolitan districts which showed a reduction in electorate between 1981 and 1986. They are as follows:

Non-metropolitan County District (ranked by percentage reduction)	Electorate		1981-86 reduction	
	1981 Register	1986 Register	Decrease in electorate	Percentage decrease
Shepway	67,607	64,945	-2,662	-3·9
Kingston upon Hull	206,574	201,345	-5,229	-2·5
Pendle	65,659	64,562	-1,097	-1·7
Scunthorpe	48,820	48,192	-628	-1·3
Middlesbrough	109,649	108,263	-1,386	-1·3
Epsom and Ewell	51,693	51,040	-653	-1·3
Brighton	121,311	120,120	-1,191	-1·0
Burnley	67,590	67,125	-465	-0·7
Easington	77,065	76,598	-467	-0·6
Blackburn	103,565	102,998	-567	-0·5
Bristol	307,089	305,920	-1,169	-0·4
Derwentside	68,956	68,719	-237	-0·3
Stoke-on-Trent	196,300	195,678	-622	-0·3
Sedgefield	69,604	69,400	-204	-0·3
Southampton	159,464	159,131	-333	-0·2
Preston	94,891	94,847	-44	0·0
Wansbeck	48,254	48,247	-7	0·0

WALES

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sites where planning permission has been granted for opencast coal mining in Wales, but which are pending authorisation for working by *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies and the acreage of each site.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Authorisation under the Opencast Coal Act 1958 is required only in respect of British Coal sites. One such application for such authorisation in respect of a site for which planning permission has been granted is before my right hon. Friend for decision. This relates to 321·07 acres of land at Gilfach Iago, Ammanford, Dyfed.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the sites for which planning

permission has been sought, but not yet decided upon, for opencast coal mining in Wales by *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies and the acreage of each site;

(2) if he will list the sites for which planning permission has been granted for the development of opencast coal mining in Wales in each year since 1979 to *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies and the acreage of each site.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sites in Wales where opencast coal mines are being worked by *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies and the acreage of each site.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: British Coal has provided the following information for its sites where coaling operations are in progress:

	Acres
Ashfield House Farm, Ewloe, Clwyd	41
East Pit, Gwauncaegurwen, West Glamorgan	713
Ffos Las, Trimsaran, Dyfed	1,045
Ffyndaff, Rhigos, Mid Glamorgan	750
Garnant, Garnant, Dyfed	284
Ley Farm, Chirk, Clwyd	85
Maesgwyn Further Extension, Banwen, West Glamorgan	[1]1,235
Nant Helen, Ystradgynlais, Powys and West Glamorgan	762
Park Slip Extension, Aberkenfig, Mid Glamorgan	[1]443

British Coal has also provided the following information for private sites for which licences under the Opencast Coal Act 1958 are still extant and where coaling operations are in progress:

	Acres
Pencoedcae, Rhymney, Gwent	4½
Pen Bryn Oer, Rhymney, Gwent (Consent originally given for a total area of 60 acres)	16
Cefn Uchaf, Glynneath, West Glamorgan	60
Cefn Rhigos, Rhigos, Mid Glamorgan	44
Gelliwarog, Ystradgynlais, Powys	7½
Caeharris, Dowlais, Mid Glamorgan (of a 35 acre land reclamation scheme)	25
Varteg Uchaf, Ystradgynlais, Powys	12
Blaenpergwm Colliery, Glynneath, West Glamorgan	23
Ginny Cottages, Llanhilleth, Gwent	3
Bryn Serth, Tredegar, Gwent (of an 88 acre land reclamation scheme)	13
Gilfach Goch, Ystradgynlais, Powys	5

[1] Includes partially restored areas.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sites which have been licensed to be prospected for opencast coal in Wales by *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies; and what is the acreage of each site.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No licence is required by British Coal or private companies to carry out prospecting for opencast coal. Such operations are permitted by the general development order but there are stringent conditions which have to be observed.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning appeals concerning opencast coalmining have been heard by his Department since 1979, and how many were *(a)* appeals against refusals to grant permission in which the original decisions were overturned, *(b)* appeals against refusals to grant permission in which original decisions were upheld, *(c)* appeals against the granting of permission in which the original decisions were upheld, and *(d)* appeals against the granting of permission in which the original decisions were overturned.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Eleven such appeals have been determined since 1979. Six were allowed, overturning the original decision, and five were dismissed, upholding the original decision. There is no right of appeal to my right hon. Friend against the granting of permission by local planning authority.

Beef

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what effects he expects the further cuts in milk production quota to have on the Welsh beef industry.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The further cuts in milk quotas agreed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers in December could lead to an increase in dairy culling over the next two years. The Commission has however allocated 435 million ecu to meet the market management costs of dealing with extra beef during this period.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what measures have been taken by the Government to ensure a balanced beef market in the future for Welsh farmers and to shield producers from the effects in other sectors.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The retention of the beef variable premium scheme, the devaluation of the green pound, and the increase in the maximum possible rate of payment under the suckler cow premium scheme together will provide stability for the beef sector during the next two years as the balance between supply and demand improves. The next two years should see a substantial move towards lower intervention stocks and a more market-related level of production.

O and A-Levels

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on how the percentage of entrants who succeed at A levels and O levels set by the Welsh Joint Education Committee compare with those who enter for examinations set by other boards.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information from the 1986 summer examinations, as supplied by the Welsh Joint Education Committee, is as follows:

	WJEC subject entries *per cent.*	*Borrowed papers and project examinations*[1] *per cent.*
'A' level[2]	73·2	66·4
'O' level[3]	58·1	58·2

[1] Examination papers, set by examination boards other than the WJEC, borrowed by the WJEC for candidates in Wales. These figures exclude entries made directly by some examination centres in Wales to examination boards other than the WJEC — information on which is not centrally available.

[2] Percentage of subject entries achieving grade E or above.

[3] Percentage of subject entries, excluding Common Syllabus entries, achieving grade C or above.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many entrants for O and A-level examinations

in each year since 1979 in Welsh schools have sat Welsh Joint Education Committee papers; and how many have sat papers set by each of the English examination boards.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The available information on subject entries in the summer of each year, as supplied by the Welsh Joint Education Committee, is as follows:

	WJEC subject entries		*Borrowed papers and project examinations*[1]	
	'O' level and Common Syllabus	*'A' level*	*'O' level*	*'A' level*
1979[2]	155,653	19,707	—	—
1980[2]	161,168	20,135	—	—
1981	168,908	21,282	2,444	862
1982	170,789	22,536	2,477	784
1983	174,640	23,635	2,645	829
1984	177,257	23,283	2,738	828
1985	174,652	23,142	2,947	796
1986	188,463	23,209	2,986	747

[1] Examination papers, set by examination boards other than the WJEC, borrowed by the WJEC for candidates in Wales. These figures exclude entries by some examination centres in Wales made directly to examination boards other than the WJEC — information on which is not centrally available.
[2] Separate figures for borrowed papers are not available; they are included under WJEC subject entries.

SCOTLAND

Development Department (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the planned levels of capital spending on roads, housing, water and sewerage in 1986-87, the likely outturn for 1986-87 and planned expenditure for 1987-88 by the Scottish Development Department and each of the regional authorities.

Mr. Ancram: Planned capital expenditure on transport, water and sewerage and housing for 1986-87 and 1987-88 is:

	1986-87 £ million	*1987-88 £ million*
Roads		
Scottish Development Department	96	107
Local authorities	159	155
Water and sewerage	101	107
Housing	644	720

The information about roads expenditure by local authorities includes expenditure on other forms of transport infrastructure. The information about housing expenditure relates to expenditure by all agencies. The likely outturn for 1986-87 is expected to be closely in line with planned expenditure in all cases.

Decisions have not yet been taken about final capital allocations to regional authorities for 1987-88.

Housing

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers of houses below the tolerable standard in each of the housing authorities in Scotland;

(2) how many houses below the tolerable standard there are in *(a)* Shettleston constituency, *(b)* Glasgow district, *(c)* Strathclyde region and *(d)* Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: The number of houses below the tolerable standard reported to the Scottish Development Department at 31 March 1986 is set out in the table. Information is collected centrally only for the areas of District and Islands Councils.

Number of houses below the tolerable standard at 31 March 1986

Areas	*Number*
SCOTLAND	56,516
Borders	2,258
Berwickshire	940
Ettrick and Lauderdale	668
Roxburgh[1]	450
Tweeddale[1]	200
Central	1,635
Clackmannan	482
Falkirk	687
Stirling	466
Dumfries and Galloway	912
Annandale and Eskdale	251
Nithsdale	400
Stewartry	169
Wigtown	92
Fife	3,252
Dunfermline	526
Kirkcaldy	861
North East Fife	1,865
Grampian	6,016
Aberdeen	2,018
Banff and Buchan	1,769
Gordon	461
Kincardine and Deeside	400
Moray	1,368
Highland	5,323
Badenoch and Strathspey	260
Caithness	425
Inverness	651
Lochaber	154
Nairn	48
Ross and Cromarty	2,600
Skye and Lochalsh	650
Sutherland	535
Lothian	8,214
East Lothian	939
Edinburgh	6,041
Midlothian	654
West Lothian	580
Strathclyde	21,485
Argyll and Bute	4,200
Bearsden and Milngavie	75
Clydebank	69
Clydesdale	249
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	67
Cumnock and Doon Valley	210
Cunninghame	183
Dumbarton	125
East Kilbride	120
Eastwood	38
Glasgow	11,452
Hamilton	900
Inverclyde	355
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	123
Kyle and Carrick	328
Monklands	248
Motherwell	730
Renfrew	2,000
Strathkelvin	13
Tayside	3,424
Angus	1,147
Dundee	1,470

Areas	Number
Perth and Kinross	807
Orkney Islands	1,155
Shetland Islands	977
Western Isles Islands	1,865

[1] Position at 31 March 1985—details not available for 1986.

Homelessness

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the numbers of homeless persons in *(a)* Shettleston constituency, *(b)* Glasgow district, *(c)* Strathclyde region and *(d)* Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: Estimates of the numbers of homeless persons are not available. The figures below show the numbers of households that applied under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and were housed in temporary accommodation at 30 September 1986. Information is collected centrally only for local government district and islands councils areas.

Households in temporary accommodation at 30 September 1986

Area	Number of households
Glasgow	114
Strathclyde[1]	445
Scotland[1]	712

[1] Based on incomplete returns.

BBC (Burglary)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Strathclyde police report for him about the burglary at BBC Scotland, Queen Margaret drive, Glasgow, on 23 December 1986.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received a report from Strathclyde police about this matter. I understand from the chief constable that the incident to which the hon. Member refers has not, in fact, been reported to the police.

Radiation

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to monitor the proportion of congenital malformations amongst babies born to women living in those parts of Scotland which were subject to rises in radiation levels following the nuclear accident at Chernobyl; and what plans he has to publish the information.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Peterhead Prison

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the number of prison officers employed at Peterhead prison and whether this is up to establishment.

Mr. Lang [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 January 1987, c. *242*]: The number of prison officer grade personnel employed at Peterhead prison at 1 January 1987 was 233 and the inmate population at 6 January 1987 was 172. In addition, eight civilian instructors and tradesmen were in posts for which prison officer grade staff with relevant qualifications were not available. The agreed complement of prison officer grades at Peterhead is 268, geared to an inmate population of 281.

Dundee

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number and percentage of people employed in manufacturing services, construction and primary industries in each district ward in Dundee at the 1981 census; and what subsequent comparative information on such district wards he possesses.

Mr. Lang [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987, c. *397*]: The tables give estimates derived from the 1981 census of population. Many of the figures have been estimated from small numbers in a 10 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to proportionately large sampling errors. For example, for an average ward, there is a roughly one in three chance that an estimate of 100 is in error by more than 30, and a roughly one in three chance that an estimate of 600 is in error by more than 60.

No more recent information is available.

1981 Census Residents aged 16 or over in Employment
(a) Numbers—Estimated number by industry

District Ward of Dundee	Primary 0, 1	Manufacturing 2-4	Construction 5	Services 6-9	Total working population
Ancrum	9	416	66	1,390	1,882
Ardler	0	652	146	915	1,714
Balgillo	63	528	116	1,298	2,005
Baxter Park	27	376	64	1,045	1,512
Blackshade	42	697	158	866	1,763
Broughty Ferry	45	348	168	1,011	1,572
Caird	55	667	77	1,061	1,859
Central	9	301	47	895	1,253
Clepington	47	328	47	622	1,044
Coldside	21	451	103	759	1,333
Craigie Bank	20	441	143	973	1,578
Craigie Barns	30	464	111	1,028	1,633
Douglas	76	799	105	827	1,807
Downfield	44	696	148	1,314	2,202
Drumgeith	48	694	133	799	1,674
Dudhope	11	423	54	954	1,442

District Ward of Dundee	Primary 0, 1	Manufacturing 2-4	Construction 5	Services 6-9	Total working population
Eastern	49	369	155	1,164	1,737
Fairmuir	60	403	141	1,088	1,692
Fintry North	11	864	197	996	2,068
Fintry South	0	802	183	1,045	2,030
Gillburn	21	369	232	1,255	1,877
Gourdie	41	649	134	814	1,638
Gowrie	166	440	68	1,183	1,858
Hilltown	37	513	128	944	1,623
Law	19	287	115	1,015	1,437
Lochee East	46	671	110	873	1,701
Lochee West	10	756	155	890	1,812
Logie	10	326	71	887	1,295
Longhaugh	22	562	124	742	1,450
Maryfield	31	413	124	1,011	1,579
Menzieshill	30	569	180	1,207	1,985
Midmill	70	591	104	672	1,437
Monifieth East	54	506	97	1,421	2,078
Monifieth West	106	424	127	1,040	1,698
Pitalpin	11	677	111	1,110	1,910
Riverside	8	244	117	1,171	1,542
Rockwell	19	279	167	819	1,284
Sidlaw	398	505	175	1,078	2,157
St. Mary's	48	750	183	904	1,884
St. Ninians	11	612	158	1,234	2,014
Trottick	41	515	165	1,019	1,740
Wellgate	36	435	100	952	1,524
West Ferry	20	542	177	1,005	1,744
Whitfield	46	367	80	711	1,204

Notes:

1. Numbers by type of industry have been estimated from a 10 per cent. sample; the total working population is the result of a 100 per cent. count.

2. The numbers in the column headings indicate the 1980 SIC divisions included in each category eg in this table "primary industries" comprises agriculture, forestry and fishing (SIC Division 0) and Energy and Water Supply (SIC Division 1).

(b) Percentage of the total working population—Estimated distribution by industry

District Ward of Dundee	Primary 0,1	Manufacturing 2-4	Construction 5	Services 6-9
Ancrum	0	22	4	74
Ardler	0	38	9	53
Balgillo	3	26	6	65
Baxter Park	2	25	4	69
Blackshade	2	40	9	49
Broughty Ferry	3	22	11	64
Caird	3	36	4	57
Central	1	24	4	71
Clepington	5	31	5	60
Coldside	2	34	8	57
Craigie Bank	1	28	9	62
Craigie Barns	2	28	7	63
Douglas	4	44	6	46
Downfield	2	32	7	60
Drumgeith	3	41	8	48
Dudhope	1	29	4	66
Eastern	3	21	9	67
Fairmuir	4	24	8	64
Fintry North	1	42	10	48
Fintry South	0	40	9	51
Gillburn	1	20	12	67
Gourdie	3	40	8	50
Gowrie	9	24	4	64
Hilltown	2	32	8	58
Law	1	20	8	71
Lochee East	3	39	6	51
Lochee West	1	42	9	49
Logie	1	25	5	68
Longhaugh	2	39	9	51
Maryfield	2	26	8	64
Menzieshill	2	29	9	61
Midmill	5	41	7	47
Monifieth East	3	24	5	68
Monifieth West	6	25	7	61
Pitalpin	1	35	6	58
Riverside	1	16	8	76
Rockwell	1	22	13	64

District Ward of Dundee	Primary 0,1	Manufacturing 2-4	Construction 5	Services 6-9
Sidlaw	18	23	8	50
St Mary's	3	40	10	48
St Ninians	1	30	8	61
Trottick	2	30	9	59
Wellgate	2	29	7	62
West Ferry	1	31	10	58
Whitfield	4	30	7	59

TRANSPORT

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimated cost of the east coast main line electrification project.

Mr. David Mitchell: The total authorised cost for the east coast main line electrification project, including new locomotives and rolling stock, is £314.5 million at 1983 prices, equivalent to some £360 million at 1986-87 prices.

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the projected completion date of the east coast main line electrification project.

Mr. David Mitchell: 1991.

A46-A47 Link Road

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport why he gave approval to the A46-A47 link road in east Leicester; what representations he received against the scheme; and if he will provide a breakdown by party.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[pursuant to the reply,* 14 January 1987, c. *193.]*: The second paragraph of the above answer was misleading. The answer should read as follows.

The A46-A47 link road is the responsibility of Leicestershire county council, the highway authority. The scheme was accepted for transport supplementary grant in the 1985-86 financial year in recognition of its more than local traffic importance. The grant enables county councils to plan and finance major schemes. Acceptance for grant does not imply any views on the detailed aspects of any statutory orders which may still be necessary for the scheme.

The link road was included in the county structure plan approved in 1980. It was not affected by the alterations to the plan which are now passing through the statutory processes.

This Department does not have a record of all the objections that may have been made to the county council.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether SNCF anticipates customs inspectors on Channel tunnel trains travelling further than Ashford in pursuit of their duties;

(2) whether any Customs and Excise facilities will be operated at Ashford to handle *(a)* passenger and *(b)* freight traffic generated by the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

No decisions have been taken about on-train controls for passengers or freight carried on through services. French and United Kingdom Customs are holding discussions with SNCF and British Rail respectively about the controls for through trains. But it is likely that the United Kingdom customs controls would follow the familiar red-green arrangements for passengers terminating their journeys at Ashford or Waterloo and that facilities for shuttle train freight traffic would be provided at a purpose built clearance depot at Ashford.

Customs controls generally are to form part of a protocol to the Treaty at present under discussion covering all frontier controls.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Telephone Tapping

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Attorney-General whether any prosecutions have been brought under the Data Protection Act for unlawful tapping of telephone conversations by the means of misuse of telephone logging equipment.

The Attorney-General: No.

PRIME MINISTER

Privatisation

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Prime Minister (1) if she will list those Government-owned concerns or concerns owned by Government agencies or by wholly-Government-sponsored corporations or bodies, which were not limited companies, but which have become limited companies, although remaining in the same ownership, since 1979; and if she will state, in each case, how many of the employees, although still employed by the company, ceased to be civil servants;

(2) if she will list those private limited companies wholly or partly-owned by the Government or by Government agencies or by wholly Government-sponsored corporations or bodies.

The Prime Minister: The information in the form requested is not available. I refer the hon. Member to pages 27 and 28 of the supplementary statements to the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund accounts 1985-86 (HC 69), the various accounts laid before Parliament by public corporations or bodies, such as the nationalised industries, and paragraph 539 of the statement on the Defence Estimates 1985 (Cmnd. 9430-I).

Telephone Tapping

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Prime Minister whether her assurances of 10 December 1986, *Official Report,* column 161, with regard to the tapping of right hon. and hon. Members' telephones apply equally to right hon. and

hon. Members' conversations with persons whose telephones are being legally tapped; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave on 10 December to my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Sir Alex Fletcher).

Diplomatic Immunity

Mr. Canavan asked the Prime Minister whether she will initiate action to stop abuse of diplomatic immunity by diplomats and members of their families particularly in cases involving criminal offences against children.

The Prime Minister: The Government and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons both reviewed the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations and abuse of diplomatic immunities and privileges in 1984-85. The Government agreed (Cmnd. 9697) with the Committee's recommendation that they should apply the Vienna convention more firmly. That is now our policy. The diplomatic corps is well aware that in the absence of a waiver of immunity we require the immediate withdrawal of alleged serious offenders.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister, further to her written answer of 28 February 1985, *Official Report*, column *303*, to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby concerning the cost of the common agricultural policy, whether she will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing by how much common agricultural policy expenditure has increased since 1984 compared to the increase in the European Economic Community's own resources base; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The financial guideline for agriculture first applied to expenditure in 1986. In that year the budget provision for expenditure, excluding that in Spain and Portugal, was 9·2 per cent. higher than in the base period used for the calculation of the guideline (the average of 1984 and 1985), compared with an 8·5 per cent. increase in the own resources base.

The Council agreed in July 1986, as provided for in the conclusions on budget discipline, that the 1986 reference framework including the agricultural guideline could be increased because of exceptional circumstances resulting from the decline in the United States dollar.

For 1987, the draft budget provides for agricultural guarantee expenditure to rise at a rate no higher than the increase in the own resources base (an increase compared with the base period of 13·4 per cent. excluding Spain and Portugal).

EMPLOYMENT

Restart Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Paymaster General how many of the 2,000 additional staff recruited to administer the restart programme came from the ethnic minorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have introduced ethnic monitoring of staff recruited into my Department, but our information is not broken down on the basis of individual programmes. Of the new staff recruited to the employment and enterprise group of the Manpower Services Commission in the period May to Novembr 1986 figures so far available indicate that approximately 9 per cent. came from the ethnic minorities.

Pay Levels (Coventry)

Mr. Park asked the Paymaster General what information he has as to how many workers in the Coventry travel-to-work area now earn less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold.

Mr. Lee: Information on earnings is not available for individual travel-to-work areas.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Paymaster General if factory inspectors appointed to the Health and Safety Executive are cleared for security purposes.

Mr. Trippier: Factory inspectors are cleared for security purposes to the extent necessary for carrying out their duties.

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to his answer of 19 January concerning the sample survey of the job training scheme pilots, how large the survey will be; if he will name the independent consultants involved; what precisely the survey will cover; and when he expects it to be completed.

Mr. Trippier: The survey of the new job training scheme pilots is being carried out by Research Bureau Limited. The survey includes interviews will all managing agents and most training and practical experience providers in the pilot areas, together with postal questionnaires to a sample of about two hundred trainees and a small number of people who have left the scheme or who were offered the option of joining but who did not take the offer.

The survey will provide a range of information on the characteristics of trainees, managing agents, training and experience providers, occupations in which training is given, and the qualifications sought, and the reasons why trainees and employers have participated in the scheme.

It is expected that the consultants will report the results of the survey in the spring.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Paymaster General if he will give a breakdown by month of *(a)* the numbers being accepted onto the enterprise allowance scheme since its inception and *(b)* the total number in receipt of the enterprise allowance for each month since its inception for (i) England and (ii) Wales.

Mr. Trippier: Separate figures for the numbers accepted onto the enterprise allowance scheme in England and Wales were not available until January 1985. Until this time they were calculated on a national basis.

Entrants and recipients of enterprise allowance scheme

Month	England		Wales	
	Entrants	Recipients	Entrants	Recipients
1983				
August	3,380	—	307	—

Month	England		Wales	
	Entrants	Recipients	Entrants	Recipients
September	3,338	—	266	—
October	4,243	—	315	—
November	3,284	—	252	—
December	2,091	—	162	—
1984				
January	2,697	—	220	—
February	2,193	—	168	—
March	1,973	—	169	—
April	2,658	—	166	—
May	2,950	—	228	—
June	3,281	—	245	—
July	4,428	—	323	—
August	2,812	—	179	—
September	3,089	—	228	—
October	4,090	—	300	—
November	3,185	—	265	—
December	2,661	32,932	161	2,437
1985				
January	2,931	33,631	311	2,551
February	3,699	34,072	252	2,574
March	3,649	35,400	300	2,711
April	5,237	38,196	381	2,832
May	4,231	40,981	336	3,016
June	3,939	42,090	323	3,109
July	4,654	42,882	353	3,199
August	3,197	42,824	302	3,208
September	4,530	43,182	328	3,293
October	3,939	43,861	326	3,340
November	4,073	44,544	343	3,387
December	3,255	45,404	292	3,516
1986				
January	3,640	45,864	294	3,566
February	4,179	49,306	324	3,575
March	5,784	47,414	457	3,614
April	6,075	47,014	416	3,739
May	5,592	49,071	459	3,900
June	6,977	50,443	558	4,117
July	5,198	51,984	424	4,284
August	4,547	53,381	384	4,376
September	6,850	55,150	561	4,508
October	6,169	57,074	432	4,657
November	6,316	59,214	456	4,753
December	5,657	61,891	408	4,869

Community Programme

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement about proposed reductions in community programme plans in 1987-88; and if he will provide a breakdown of the reductions as between the voluntary sector and the private sector for each of the Manpower Services Commission areas.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987, c. *564-65*]: The Manpower Services Commission plans to provide around 245,000 filled places within the community programme in 1987-88, creating opportunities for about 300,000 long-term unemployed people. The allocation of these places will be determined in the light of local circumstances in the normal way. Resources will continue to be focused on those areas most in need.

Departmental Achievement

Mr. Pawsey asked the Paymaster General if he will list the principal achievements of his Department since 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1986, c. *813*]: The effectiveness of our policies has been shown by the 1 million extra jobs created over the past three years and the many unemployed people helped by our employment and training measures.

Expenditure on employment and training measures has risen over the three years in question by more than 50 per cent. to a total of some £3 billion this year. The Action for Jobs campaign, launched in April 1986, is promoting greater awareness and increasing the effectiveness of the whole range of our employment and training measures.

Major developments in existing measures over the past three years include the expansion of work experience through the Community Programme and a refocusing of the Voluntary Projects Programme to help long-term unemployed people and those who wish to start their own businesses.

New initiatives launched since 1983 include the New Workers Scheme, to increase job opportunities for the 18 to 20-year-old age group, and the Restart programme, introduced nationally in July 1986, designed to help those who have been out of work for 12 months or more. We are inviting every long-term unemployed person to a personal interview which seeks to guide the individual to one of the opportunities available including submission to a job vacancy, entry to a job club, a place in the new Restart courses, entry to the Community Programme or help with self-employment on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. In mid-December some 700,000 interviews had already been conducted. We are now piloting Restart for those unemployed over six months.

Through the City Action Teams and the eight task forces set up under the Inner City Initiative, my Department is also helping to improve the targeting of all Government programmes and resources in the most deprived inner city areas and assist the local communities to tackle the employment, environmental, and social problems more effectively. In addition, £8 million is being made available to help task forces to pilot experimental employment and enterprise related schemes to deal with inner city problems.

In September 1985, the Department took over responsibility for small firms and tourism. Our major priority has been to make information and advice more accessible to the self-employed and small businessmen by expanding facilities available through the small firms service, local enterprise agencies, the Manpower Services Commission, and jobcentres. In addition, to help establish a network of viable self-supporting enterprise agencies we have introduced a five-year local enterprise agencies grant scheme of financial assistance and £2·5 million in grants is being made available in the first year.

The enterprise allowance scheme which gives financial support and advice to people starting self-employment has been expanded in response to growing demand and now offers some 86,000 places a year. Over the past three years, the scheme has helped nearly 200,000 unemployed people to start up businesses, many of which have also created additional jobs for other workers.

The loan guarantee scheme has been improved and extended for five years. Since the scheme was launched in June 1981, nearly 17,300 companies have raised some £565 million with the help of the guarantee provided by the Government.

Eight regional enterprise units have been established in England to represent and promote the Department's interests in enterprise, small firms, deregulation and tourism at regional and local level.

Our strategy for vocational education and training was set out in the White Papers "Education and Training for Young People" (April 1985) and "Working together — Education and Training" (July 1986).

In 1983, we successfully launched the youth training scheme (YTS). Since then over 1 million young people have benefited, of whom more than two thirds moved into jobs, further education or training. We opened 175 information technology centres to train young people under YTS in computing and electronic assembly skills and 1986 saw a major development in YTS, which now provides two years' training for 16-year-olds and one year for 17-year-olds. YTS now gives young people the opportunity to work towards recognised vocational qualifications. The Government are currently investing about £1 billion annually in YTS and more than 300,000 trainees have already entered the new programme.

Our technical and vocational education initiative (TVEI) aims at financing the development of a more relevant and career-related curriculum in schools and will be developed into a national scheme from Autumn 1987 at a cost of £900 million over the next 10 years. In addition £25 million was made available over the period 1985 to 1987 for in-service training of teachers to promote developments particularly related to TVEI.

We have established the National Council for Vocational Qualifications covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will ensure the implementation of a clear system of vocational qualifications, relevant to the world of industry and commerce, providing opportunities for progress into higher skills.

Important adult training developments which have taken place since 1983 include Open Tech, local collaborative projects, the job training scheme, career development loans and increased emphasis on training for enterprise. Our adult training strategy has been successful in influencing adult training and making it more relevant to labour market needs. Over 250,000 adults will be training during 1986-87, more than double the total in 1983-84.

The Government have taken steps to reduce the legal and administrative burdens on business. The White Paper "Lifting the Burden" (July 1985) set out a range of 80 measures designed to reduce burdens on business and a second White Paper "Building Business . . . Not Barriers" (May 1986) reported progress on the earlier proposals and put forward a series of new measures. It also gave details of the new administrative arrangements within Government for assessing the impact on business of proposals to introduce and alter regulations.

The Wages Act 1986 allows greater freedom and flexibility to employers in planning pay structures. In particular, by removing those under 21 from regulation it will help increase job opportunities for young people.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1986 removes restrictions on women's hours of work in industrial employment. The Act also extends the coverage of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to firms with five or fewer employees and to partnerships of five or fewer (in respect of the partners themselves), narrows the exemption for private households and voids sex discrimination terms in collective agreements and employers' rules.

We have continued the step by step approach to industrial relations, designed to get a fair balance in collective bargaining and to make trade unions more accountable to their members. Among other measures the Trade Union Act 1984 requires the holding of secret ballots for election to union governing bodies and makes secret ballots a condition of trade unions' legal immunity for organising industrial action.

The unemployment benefit service has made good progress in improving its cost-effectiveness through better management practices including the development of an overall budgeting and operational planning system. The introduction of a new advanced computerised system which will be fully implemented by the end of 1987 will offer an improved service to claimants and achieve an 8 per cent. productivity improvement.

Major efforts are also being made to advise and guide claimants back into the labour market, to ensure that they remain available for work and to cut down on the level of fraud within the system.

My Department has continued to play a major part in the work of the European Community, particularly during the current United Kingdom presidency. The adoption of an action programme on employment growth based on an earlier proposal from the Governments of the United Kingdom, Italy and the Republic of Ireland, has for the first time established clear priorities for the Community's work in this area centred on support for small business, better training, more efficient labour markets and help for the long-term unemployed. We have also made major advances towards lightening burdens on business at European Community level with the agreement and implementation of the new procedures for assessing the compliance costs to business of new and existing European Community regulations in line with our own policies in the United Kingdom. Finally, we have continued to attract substantial support from the European Social Fund for employment and training programmes in the United Kingdom.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library the text of the statement of the Northern Ireland police authority concerning the practice of asking members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary their views on the Anglo-Irish Agreement; whether it was with the authority of the Chief Constable that this practice was initiated; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: This is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Police Authority for Northern Ireland did not issue any statement on the matter.

Radiation

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to monitor the proportion of congenital malformations in infants born to women living in those parts of Northern Ireland which were subject to rises in radiation levels following the nuclear accident at Chernobyl; and what plans he has to publish the information.

Mr. Viggers: There are arrangements in Northern Ireland for monitoring congenital abnormalities which should identify any significant overall increase in such abnormalities following the Chernobyl accident, though it

is unlikely to be possible to determine which abnormalities, if any, have an association with increases in radiation levels caused by this particular incident. Information on congenital abnormalities is published each year by the Department of Health and Social Services.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of surplus cereal land he proposes to exclude from production in 1987 under his set-aside scheme.

Mr. Pike asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now give details of the set-aside scheme he is proposing for surplus cereal land.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave on Thursday 22 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell).

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the level of butter stored in intervention on the latest available date in Norfolk; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively;

(2) what was the level of grain stored in intervention, and what were the storage points in Norfolk on 1 January or on the latest available date; and what was the comparable figure on the same date in 1979, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Gummer: The following stocks of intervention butter and grain were stored in Norfolk on 1 January 1987. The stocks at the beginning of 1984 and 1985 were given on 29 January 1986, *Official Report*, column *537*. Records of storage locations in 1979 are no longer available.

	tonnes
Butter	
King's Lynn	3,486
Thetford	1,517
Grain	
Wisbech	42,161
Downham Market	11,426
Methwold	9,841
Stoke Ferry	14,985
Trafford	9,838
King's Lynn	3,007
No. Forge	64,756
Great Massingham	4,225
Shipdham	14,155
Walsingham	7,039
Fakenham	11,823
Foulsham	16,533
Aylesham	9,942
Rackheath	8,476
Snetterton	22,664
Fersfield	18,828
Bressingham	10,943
Diss	11,972

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the present extent of overhang of beet intervention stocks; how this compares with the situation at this time in 1986; and what are the prospects for 1987.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Animals (Exports)

Mr. Hardy asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, following the recent transport of sheep to Spain in breach of his Department's conditions, he will prohibit the export of farm animals for slaughter.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* the initiatives currently being undertaken by his Department to assist manufacturing industry.

Mr. Butcher: My Department offers a wide range of measures to assist manufacturing industry. They are grouped under four headings:

(i) business and technical advisory services, under which support is given to allow firms to obtain advice on productivity, quality assurance, product design, biotechnology, the application of microelectronics and the use of integrated circuits;

(ii) innovation, under which selective financial support is given for research and development projects leading to new products and processes;

(iii) national and regional investment, under which support is given by way of assistance for selected major projects, for implementation studies and demonstration and investment projects relating to new technology, for quality assurance projects, regional assistance and regional development grants;

(iv) exports, under which firms are given information on overseas markets, help with entry into and the detailed requirements of overseas markets, and grants for major overseas projects.

Competition Policy

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he now expects to publish the conclusions of his review of competition policy.

Mr. Howard: I expect the work of the review of law and policy on mergers and restrictive trade practices to continue until the end of this year. Meanwhile, if changes of policy within the existing law are identified as desirable, the Government will not hesitate to implement them.

Films, Publishing and Copyright

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed in his Department dealing with *(a)* commercial film making, *(b)* publishing and *(c)* copyright law.

Mr. Pattie: The numbers of staff dealing predominantly with *(a)* commercial film making, *(b)* publishing and *(c)* copyright law are four, two and eight, respectively.

Departmental Expenditure (Wales)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total expenditure of his Department

which is incurred in Wales for the current financial year and the most recent for which complete information is available.

Mr. Butcher *[pursuant to the reply, 19 January 1987, c. 398]*: Complete information on expenditure by my Department on a regional basis could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, we can say that in 1985-86 £3·7 million was spent in Wales under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 and over £1·9 million on support for innovation under the Science and Technology Act 1965. It is expected that similar amounts will be spent in 1986-87.

THE ARTS

Sherman Theatre, Cardiff

Mr. Terlezki asked the Minister for the Arts what representations have been made to him about the possible closure, through lack of funds, of the Sherman theatre in Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: No representations have been made to me about the theatre. The decision to withdraw grant has been taken by the University College, Cardiff.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Sir Peter Blaker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Governments which have indicated that they will recognise the proposed Hong Kong British National (Overseas) passport as a valid travel document.

Mr. Renton: The following countries have indicated publicly that they will recognise passports endorsed with the national status of British National (Overseas): United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Spain. Of the many other Governments that we have approached over the BN(O) passport, a number have given us favourable preliminary reactions; none have stated that they will not recognise the new passport.

Soviet Union (Parcels Service)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to make representations to the Soviet Union to allow parcels to be sent from the United Kingdom to friends and relatives living in the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The parcel post agreement of the Universal Postal Union to which the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom are signatories allows parcels to be sent from Britain to the Soviet Union. We continue to press the Soviet authorities to remove obstructions to the free passage of mail to the Soviet Union.

Vienna Conference

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conference held in Vienna on East/West relations.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on 21 January.

Soviet Union (Visits)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to visit the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has an invitation from the Soviet Foreign Minister to visit the Soviet Union this year. Dates have not yet been discussed.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider making proposals to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for multiple parliamentary visits of groups independent of IPU or conducted tours to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to make such proposals, which are for right hon. and hon. Members themselves. The Foreign Affairs Committee and a group of parliamentarians under IPU auspices have paid successful visits to the Soviet Union in the last two years. We consider parliamentary exchanges can play a useful role in increasing mutual understanding.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he proposes to take any action in order to stimulate more effective exchange of visits by friends and relatives to and from the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I raised the question of family visits and freer travel in my talks in Moscow last week. I impressed upon the Soviet authorities the need for a more flexible and humane approach in this area. We are also working at the Vienna CSCE meeting to reduce obstacles to travel.

Anglo-Soviet Relations

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of Anglo-Russian relations in the light of the Reykjavik meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev.

Mr. Renton: Since the Reykjavik meeting we have continued to maintain an active dialogue with the Soviet Government on arms control, human rights, regional issues and other matters of mutual interest.

I discussed these matters in Moscow last week, stressing the need for progress on human rights.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to improve relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Renton: We are conducting an active dialogue with the Soviet authorities aiming to secure greater respect for human rights, progress in arms control, an increase in trade and contacts between people at all levels.

Soviet Union (Embassies)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of Soviet personnel at present working at the Russian embassy in London; how many British personnel are employed at the Russian embassy in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The total number of Soviet personnel at present working at the Soviet embassy in London is 72. We are not aware of any British staff working at the embassy.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of British personnel in the British embassy in Moscow; how many Russian personnel are employed at the embassy in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There are currently 74 British and 72 Soviet personnel employed at the British embassy in Moscow.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest development in the reallocation of a site and building of a new British embassy in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Negotiations with the Soviet Government over the reciprocal provision of embassy sites in London and Moscow have taken place, intermittently, over many years. In May 1986, the two sides initialled the text of a sites exchange agreement under which there would be a (cost free) exchange of two sites in Moscow for two sites in London. Our objective is to sign this agreement soon, but the Soviet side has not yet been willing to proceed to signature.

Helsinki Agreement

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the response by the Soviet Union to the Helsinki agreement at the Vienna conference to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom delegation to the Vienna CSCE follow-up meeting raised the issue of Soviet compliance with its CSCE commitments on many occasions during the first phase of the meeting. Despite a small number of promising signs their overall response has been unsatisfactory. Many questions posed by our delegation to their Soviet counterparts remain unanswered. We hope for a more serious response in the forthcoming phase of the meeting.

Drugs

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends to take against those countries from which drugs are being exported to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Drug production, trafficking and misuse are a real or potential threat to all countries, whether producer, transit or consumer. No one country can hope to defeat the problem alone; a key element of our strategy is therefore to encourage and support international action against the drug traffickers, whatever their nationality. We urge all Governments to take all possible steps to prevent the export of drugs and to co-operate in the international effort to curb illicit drug production and misuse.

EC (Trade with Soviet Union)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made as to how the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has benefited through increased trade with the European Community in agriculture, industrial equipment and military equipment, since the early 1950s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Soviet imports from the EC have grown substantially since the 1950s but they remain relatively small in terms of total Soviet trade. In agriculture, purchases of meat, dairy products and grain from the EC and elsewhere have done something to improve the diet of the Soviet people which Soviet agriculture has itself largely been unable to do. The contribution of imports from the EC to Soviet industry has been of importance in some fields, notably natural gas, chemicals and automobiles. EC states have effectively refrained from exporting military equipment to the USSR through their application of export controls on strategic goods and technologies.

Soviet Union (Human Rights)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to secure the publication of the report by the International Human Rights Committee about human rights in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The second periodic report submitted by the Soviet Union to the Human Rights Committee was published by the United Nations as UN document CC PR/C/8/ADD3. This report was discussed by the Human Rights Committee during its 23rd session in October 1984 and a summary of these discussions is contained in the committee's report to the 40th session of the United Nations General Assembly, published on 19 September 1985 as UN document A/40/40.

Soviet Union (British Students)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British students are currently studying in Kiev; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We are not aware of any British students currently studying in Kiev.

Republic of Ireland (Agreements)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the continuation in force of the 1925 boundary agreement and the Ireland (Confirmation of Agreement) Act 1925; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Our policy is that both the 1925 boundary agreement and the Ireland (Confirmation of Agreement) Act 1925 should remain in force.

ENVIRONMENT

Deep Mining

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been undertaken by his Department into the effects of deep mining on the water table and the subsequent effect on trees.

Mr. Tracey: None.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the second report of his Department's research into houses in multiple occupation will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The report is being published today. Copies have been placed in the Library and are being sent to local authorities and others concerned. We shall be consulting them on various detailed matters arising from the report.

The report indicates that houses in multiple occupation do a useful job in many towns and cities. They provide relatively cheap furnished accommodation and a lack of restriction which is popular with some tenants. But standards in the sample of 550 HMOs surveyed for our research were often very low. Some needed major repairs, others lacked amenities. Many needed improvements in their fire escape arrangements.

Local authorities already have duties and extensive powers to take action to improve standards in appropriate cases. But the research suggests that practice is patchy. We have already issued advice to local authorities on their powers following the consolidation of the Housing Acts. We now propose to back this up with further advice and assistance. We shall be recruiting an environmental health officer to advise the Department and to help prepare and publicise examples of good practice. We are asking authorities to include HMOs in the priority categories where grants should be concentrated. We also plan to issue leaflets for HMO landlords and residents to improve their knowledge of their respective rights and of the availability of grant.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement following his consideration of the study of the Building Research Establishment by Sir Henry Chilver and Sir Peter Harrop.

Mr. Ridley: I welcome the recommendations made by this study, which provides a clear basis for the future of the Building Research Establishment within my Department. A copy of the study report has been placed in the House of Commons Library today and copies are being sent to those who contributed to the study.

Among its major recommendations the report contains proposals on BRE's primary role, on the basis for its work for the Department of the Environment, on its relationship with the construction industry and on the planning of Government research requirements:

> The report recommends that BRE's primary role should be to act as contractor for Government, working on health and safety in buildings, the performance of buildings, standards and codes of practice on construction and the pursuit of national policies on the construction and use of buildings.
>
> It also recommends that a DOE Steering Committee should be set up representing Government Departments, BRE and BRE visitors to agree a medium term research plan, settle targets, objectives and priorities and watch over performance.
>
> BRE should be allowed to undertake more work commissioned by and paid for by private industry, accounting for at least 10 per cent. but not more than 15 per cent. of total effort.
>
> Government research conducted as part of its sponsorship of the construction industry should be more concerned than at present with fostering competitiveness and less with performance standards and research of this kind should be carried out mainly through research associations on a cost-sharing basis with industry.

Discussions are now beginning on the implementation of the recommendations including both management and the trade unions involved.

Shorthold Tenancies

Mr. Raynsford asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the total number of protected shorthold tenancies which (a) have been created and (b) remain in letting in each of the years from 1981 to 1986 in (i) Greater London and (ii) the rest of England and Wales.

Mr. Tracey: This information is not available. Over 5,000 protected shorthold tenancies were created in England and Wales in 1981, the first year after shorthold was introduced, and the only year for which figures are available. Information about shortholds created since 1 December 1981 has not been collected because the compulsory rent registration requirement for new shortholds outside the greater London area was lifted on that date.

Water Legislation

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Copeland, (Dr. Cunningham) *Official Report*, 18 December 1986, columns *685-86*, if he will list the names of individuals and companies which received fees in 1985-86 and 1986-87; what fees each received; and, in each case, what services were provided.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Nitrates

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, *Official Report*, 18 December 1986, column 685, what progress has been made regarding consultations with farming interests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Discussions are being held with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the contribution which may be made by farming interests towards the reduction of nitrate levels in water. In addition officials have met representatives of the fertiliser industry, water authorities are being encouraged to meet local farmers, and I will be discussing the subject with the National Farmers Union at an early date.

Water Shortage

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's response to the present problems in London and other areas regarding water shortages and water mains bursts.

Mr. John Patten: Water supply difficulties have arisen recently because pipes have burst due to frost action and

water is running to waste. Water undertakers are repairing their own mains quickly but most water is being lost through bursts in consumers' plumbing systems. It is therefore most important that consumers should economise with water use and those who suffer a burst should turn off their water supply at the stop-cock and get their pipes repaired. All water undertakers are at present in general able to provide water to meet this extra demand on their supply systems which in some places exceeds the peak demand of a hot summer. The position in London is delicately balanced. The Thames Water Authority is manipulating its system to meet ever-changing conditions and have had to make emergency supplies available in some places including to hospitals. I am monitoring the situation closely and wish to thank water authorities, water companies and their staff for their efforts to maintain water supplies during very difficult conditions.

National Water Grid

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on a national water grid; and what action his Department is taking towards the creation of such a grid.

Mr. John Patten: I will answer this question shortly.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are employed in his Department dealing with *(a)* public libraries, *(b)* heritage arts and *(c)* historic buildings.

Mr. Ridley: I will answer this question shortly.

Housing (Right to Buy)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish details of the right-to-buy awareness study which his Department has arranged for the Central Office of Information to commission, including cost, sample sizes and the research company involved.

Mr. John Patten: The Central Office of Information has commissioned on the Department's behalf a small-scale survey of the extent to which council tenants are aware of their right to buy, to help assess the effectiveness of measures to inform tenants of the changes in the Housing and Planning Act 1986. The study is being undertaken by Mark Research Limited; a sample of some 1,000 tenants in randomly selected areas will be approached; and the estimated cost is £40,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Military Equipment

Mr. Cabora asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if extra measures are being taken by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officials to ensure that Britain is not used as a centre for the illegal supply of military equipment to South Africa or Iran.

Mr. Brooke: No, long-standing Customs controls are adequate to meet the perceived risks.

Capital Taxes Office

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the backlog of work at the capital taxes office; and if he will take on extra staff to deal with it.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Current arrears of work at the capital taxes Office vary between different parts of the office from around two to four weeks input. Additional staff have been recruited and these should be able to reduce the arrears after the necessary training. Work will be reduced by the abolition last year of the immediate tax charge on certain lifetime transfers.

Domestic Output

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the annual percentage change in total output each year since 1970 using the output measure of gross domestic product at constant factor cost; and what has been the annual percentage change in the total excluding the extraction of oil and gas.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Output measure of Gross Domestic Product (percentage change)

	Total	*Excluding Oil and Gas extraction*
1970	1·7	1·7
1971	1·4	1·4
1972	3·1	3·1
1973	5·8	5·7
1974	−1·5	−1·4
1975	−1·9	−1·9
1976	2·0	1·5
1977	2·8	1·7
1978	3·4	2·7
1979	3·1	1·9
1980	−2·7	−2·9
1981	−1·5	−2·0
1982	1·7	1·1
1983	3·1	2·7
1984	3·2	3·0
1985	3·8	3·9

Agriculture

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 15 March 1985, *Official Report*, column *310*, to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby concerning value added in agriculture, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the value added figures for the United Kingdom for the years since 1982 and his forecast for 1987, together with *(a)* the estimated United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget each year and *(b)* the total amount spent in the United Kingdom out of public funds on agriculture and agricultural support, including administrative overheads.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is contained in the following table. The table gives figures for value-added in agriculture, the United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget and the amount of public support to agriculture. The data is given only up to 1985 since data for 1986 is not yet available. The Government do not make forecasts for GDP in agriculture.

Value added in agriculture, the United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget and public support to agriculture

£ million

	(a) Value added	*(b) United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget*	*(c) Public support to agriculture*
1982	5,395	589	2,155
1983	5,373	832	2,424
1984	5,971	971	2,418
1985	5,485	831	2,890

Notes:
(1) Value added in agriculture is the contribution to GDP, and covers agriculture, forestry and fishing. The figures show GDP before providing for depreciation but after providing for stock appreciation.
Source: United Kingdom National Accounts, 1986 Edition.
(2) The figures for the United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget are the total net payments to European Community institutions (excluding overseas aid).
Source: Table 3.3 of volume II of the Government's expenditure plans 1987-88 to 1989-90 (Cm 56-II).
(3) Public support to agriculture is the total for agriculture, fisheries and food including territorial departments.
Source: Table 3.4 of volume II of the Government's expenditure Plans 1987-88 to 1989-90 (Cm 56-II).
(4) Figures in columns *b* and *(c)* refer to financial years so that under the heading 1982 is given expenditure for financial year 1982-83, etc.

Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will detail the proportions of pre and post-tax increases, including national insurance contributions, paid to the top 1 per cent., 2 per cent., 3 per cent., 4 per cent., 5 per cent., 10 per cent., 20 per cent., 30 per cent., 50 per cent., and 75 per cent. of taxpayers in 1978-79 and the latest available year; and what this represents in money terms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of issuing an income tax return form for every taxpayer every year.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 January 1987, c. *412-13*]: About £9 million a year, once PAYE is fully computerised, for all employed and self-employed people known to the Revenue. The additional cost of examining these returns would depend on the amount of follow-up work to be done, but it would be considerable.

Interest Rates

Mr. Dubs asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current prevailing rate of United Kingdom interest; and what information he has on comparable rates in the United States of America, West Germany, France and Japan, respectively.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Three-month interbank rates in London are around 11 per cent. As in other main OECD countries, interest rates in the United Kingdom are kept at the level necessary to maintain appropriate monetary conditions.

Government Departments (Union Representatives)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest estimates of the numbers of elected union representatives employed in each of the main Government Departments and of the cost of providing paid time off.

Mr. Brooke: The estimates as at 1 June 1986 are shown in the following tables. Compared with the position as at 1 June 1985, the total amount of paid time off for union business shows a reduction of 18 man years (1·5 per cent.) with a consequential saving (in real terms) of £0·13 million reflecting for the fourth year the tighter control and accountability measures introduced by the revised national facilities agreement in 1982.

Civil Service non-industrial accredited union representatives
Estimates of numbers with paid time off for industrial relations duties and trade union activities (1 June 1986)
Table 1—percentage of time off

Department	*Under 5 per cent.*	*6-10*	*11-20*	*21-30*	*31-40*	*41-50*	*51-60*	*61-70*	*71-80*	*81-90*	*91-99*	*100*	*Total number involved*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	599	34	14	5	1	0	3	1	0	0	0	6	663
Customs and Excise	552	109	47	32	14	13	6	6	5	15	1	1	801
Ministry of Defence	634	197	125	19	12	13	6	4	4	0	0	25	1,239
Department of Employment Group (exc. PSA)	1,527	341	185	38	24	10	8	2	1	1	0	14	2,151
Department of Environment-Transport	386	91	51	5	4	5	3	2	3	0	0	14	564
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (incl. Overseas Development Administration)	49	7	2	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	7	72
DHSS	1,629	643	235	81	44	31	19	27	35	32	27	62	2,865
Home Office (incl. Prison Department)	819	183	168	47	10	1	1	4	5	3	2	11	1,254
Department of Trade and Industry	357	50	26	16	2	5	3	3	1	3	4	7	477
Inland Revenue	1,935	292	122	42	26	17	10	3	4	2	3	9	2,465
Lord Chancellor's Department	53	29	30	10	3	3	2	1	2	0	0	8	141
Department of National Savings	0	13	3	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	13	33
PSA (incl. Crown Suppliers)	365	60	32	5	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	4	473
Scottish Office (incl. General Register Office (Scotland), Scottish Record Office and Scottish Prison Service	180	38	16	5	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	8	250
Other Government Departments	561	137	70	25	17	14	2	2	4	1	2	24	859
Total	9,846	2,224	1,126	332	164	117	68	56	65	57	39	213	14,307

Table 2—Costs of non-industrial union elected representatives

Department	*Total number expressed or whole time equivalent*	*Cost in salaries wages and direct benefit £ million*	*Cost as percentage of wage bill*	*Total number of non-industrial staff 1 July 1986*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	22	0·29	0·20	10,186
Customs and Excise	84	1·01	0·31	25,109

Department	Total number expressed as whole time equivalent	Cost in salaries wages and direct benefit £ million	Cost as percentage of wage bill	Total number of non-industrial staff 1 July 1986
Ministry of Defence	127	1·43	0·11	93,865
Department of Employment Group	105	1·25	0·21	56,528
Department of Environment Transport	39	0·58	0·22	19,944
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including Overseas Development Administration)	14	0·20	0·15	9,269
DHSS	342	3·31	0·33	93,845
Home Office (including Prison Department)	118	1·14	0·19	34,448
Department of Trade and Industry	37	0·50	0·28	12,208
Inland Revenue	129	1·54	0·20	69,417
Lord Chancellor's Department	24	0·32	0·28	10,157
Department for National Savings	19	0·24	0·36	7,672
PSA (including Crown Suppliers)	28	0·36	0·19	15,337
Scottish Office (including Central Register Office Scotland, Scottish Record Office and Scottish Prison Service)	21	0·28	0·20	9,451
Other Government Departments	87	1·10	0·23	34,394
Total	1,196	13·53	0·21	501,830

Banking Services

Sir Peter Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will review matters relating to the law affecting banking services.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his answer*, 14 November 1986, c. 8-9]: I am pleased to announce that Professor Robert Jack of Glasgow university (a senior partner of McGrigor Donald, solicitors, Glasgow) has indicated his willingness to chair the committee to review banking services law. Mr. Geoffrey Taylor (retiring vice-chairman of Midland Bank plc) and Mrs. Liliana Archibald (a director of the Fenchurch Group) have expressed their willingness to serve as the other two members of the committee. I look forward to the review committee beginning its work very shortly.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether SNCF anticipates customs inspectors on Channel tunnel trains travelling further than Ashford in pursuit of their duties;

(2) whether any Customs and Excise facilities will be operated at Ashford to handle *(a)* passenger and *(b)* freight traffic generated by the Channel tunnel;

(3) whether French customs and excise officials will undertake on-train customs inspection for *(a)* passengers and *(b)* freight using the Channel fixed link; and whether they will travel further than Ashford.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1987, c. *469*]: No decisions have been taken about on-train controls for passengers or freight carried on through services. French and United Kingdom Customs are holding discussions with SNCF and British Rail respectively about the controls for through trains. But it is likely that the United Kingdom customs controls would follow the familiar red-green arrangements for passengers terminating their journeys at Ashford or Waterloo and that facilities for shuttle train freight traffic would be provided at a purpose built clearance depot at Ashford.

Customs controls generally are to form part of a protocol to the Treaty at present under discussion covering all frontier controls.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Hospitals

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he plans to discuss smoke-free environments in long-stay hospitals at regional review meetings.

Mrs. Currie: Policies regarding smoking on National Health Service premises may be discussed during consideration of disease prevention and health promotion which can be raised as an agenda item at regional review meetings.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the total number of beds in each regional health authority area in England for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The available information is given in the table. The total number of in-patient cases rose by 953,692 (17·7 per cent.) from 5,400,120 in 1979 to 6,353,812 in 1985 and the number of in-patient cases treated per bed increased by 31 per cent. from 14·9 to 19·5.

Average daily number of available beds in National Health Service hospitals
England—All specialties

Regional Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Northern	25,305	25,283	24,825	24,679	24,728	24,332	23,773
Yorkshire	29,946	29,298	28,959	28,488	28,034	27,470	26,793
Trent	31,712	31,516	30,944	30,744	30,481	30,000	29,391
East Anglian	13,094	13,088	13,038	12,914	13,001	12,727	12,534
North West Thames	27,904	27,116	26,947	25,852	25,342	24,529	23,816
North East Thames	29,443	28,703	28,357	29,298	28,741	27,951	26,854

Regional Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
South East Thames	28,408	27,719	27,217	26,816	26,356	25,260	24,297
South West Thames	26,242	25,416	24,799	24,021	23,719	22,994	22,210
Wessex	19,021	18,844	18,662	18,546	18,310	18,074	17,654
Oxford	13,664	13,422	13,247	13,113	12,817	12,722	12,555
South Western	24,456	24,245	24,143	23,861	23,459	22,676	21,932
West Midlands	36,263	35,782	35,437	35,228	34,544	33,761	33,108
Mersey	21,981	21,331	21,025	20,519	19,848	19,028	18,464
North Western	30,811	30,839	30,662	30,677	30,384	29,756	29,021
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors	3,419	3,376	3,407	3,346	3,327	3,236	3,086
TOTAL	361,670	355,979	351,669	348,104	343,091	334,513	325,487

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *427-28*, to the hon. Member for Oldham, West on the hospital beds breakdown for 1985, what were the figures for the same regions and specialties in 1979, and what has been the percentage change in each case from 1979 to 1985.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 22 January 1987]: The information requested is given in the table. Between 1979 and 1985 the total number of in-patient cases rose by 17·7 per cent. from 5,400,120 to 6,353,812 and the number of in-patient cases treated per bed increased by 31 per cent. from 14·9 to 19·5.

Average daily number of available beds in National Health Service hospitals; England

Regional Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	Acute[1] Number in 1979	Acute[1] Percentage change 1979 to 1985	Geriatric Number in 1979	Geriatric Percentage change 1979 to 1985	Mental illness[2] Number in 1979	Mental illness[2] Percentage change 1979 to 1985	Mental handicap Number in 1979	Mental handicap Percentage change 1979 to 1985	Maternity[3] Number in 1979	Maternity[3] Percentage change 1979 to 1985	All specialties Number in 1979	All specialties Percentage change 1979 to 1985
Northern	10,509	−7·7	3,733	5·5	6,144	−7·3	3,336	−10·4	1,321	−8·6	25,305	−6·1
Yorkshire	11,855	−5·8	5,307	−6·5	7,587	−18·3	3,482	−15·4	1,536	−10·5	29,946	−10·5
Trent	12,197	−4·4	5,055	3·6	7,582	−11·6	4,878	−19·3	1,798	−10·1	31,712	−7·3
East Anglian	5,276	−1·4	2,318	6·4	3,092	−12·6	1,626	−10·8	749	−10·5	13,094	−4·3
North West Thames	11,288	−19·8	3,234	5·7	8,021	−18·4	3,962	−8·5	1,335	−18·2	27,904	−14·7
North East Thames	13,501	−9·2	4,444	4·3	6,931	−12·7	2,818	−17·9	1,601	−9·7	29,443	−8·8
South East Thames	12,083	−13·0	4,284	−7·0	7,115	−17·3	3,415	−25·4	1,347	−9·1	28,408	−14·5
South West Thames	8,347	−14·6	3,087	−5·8	7,619	−18·7	6,095	−15·3	1,033	−24·0	26,242	−15·4
Wessex	7,600	−2·5	3,528	−1·7	4,344	−15·1	2,451	−15·4	1,077	−9·0	19,021	−7·2
Oxford	5,976	−1·9	2,085	−10·5	2,608	−12·5	2,009	−18·3	869	−8·7	13,664	−8·1
South Western	8,872	−2·3	3,745	1·0	5,734	−18·3	4,855	−24·9	1,116	−8·6	24,456	−10·3
West Midlands	14,491	−3·6	6,216	−0·6	8,753	−18·9	4,600	−15·4	2,025	−9·9	36,263	−8·7
Mersey	8,722	−18·7	3,211	−2·8	6,519	−18·1	2,504	−19·0	982	−14·5	21,981	−16·0
North Western	13,467	−7·4	4,890	7·0	6,592	−3·9	4,072	−18·8	1,712	−7·2	30,811	−5·8
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors	2,861	−19·5	—	—	402	14·2	17	−52·9	138	35·5	3,419	−9·7
TOTAL[4]	147,044	−8·6	55,139	0·3	89,045	−14·8	50,122	−17·1	18,640	−10·7	361,670	−10·0

[1] Acute is defined as all specialties except geriatrics, younger disabled, GP maternity, obstetrics, mental handicap and mental illness.
[2] Includes all mental illness specialties.
[3] Includes GP maternity and obstetrics.
[4] Regional figures may not sum to national totals due to rounding.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals in each region are now refusing all but emergency admissions; and what percentage of hospitals this is in each region.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 21 January 1987]: During the recent bad weather the vast majority of hospitals all over the country have been able to continue to admit patients from their waiting lists, although problems of transport for patients and staff, and in some cases supplies, meant that less non-urgent work was done than normal. The prime exception was Kent where the intensity of the snowfall led to five out of six districts having to restrict their work to emergencies and urgent cases such as rediotherapy.

Babies (Congenital Malformations)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to monitor the proportion of congenital malformations amongst babies born to women living in those parts of England and Wales which were subject to rises in radiation levels following the nuclear accident in Chernobyl; and what plans he has to publish the information.

Mrs. Currie: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys already operates a scheme for monitoring congenital malformations at district health authority level for a large selection of different malformations in England and Wales. This is collected on a monthly basis and any significant increase in the incidence of malformations would be detected. Details of notified congenital malformations are summarised and published annually in an OPCS Monitor in the MB3 series.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what rate of benefit will be paid to those long-term unemployed persons who accepted a place on the new job training scheme and who are still unemployed at the end of their training course; and if the same rate will be paid to a claimant who leaves before completeing six months under the scheme.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Paymaster General to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South West (Mrs. Bottomley) on 16 January 1987, at columns *334-35*.

The rate of benefit an individual will receive as a result of these new arrangements will depend on his or her circumstances at the time. Subject to any other changes of circumstances, trainees will receive the same income by way of training allowance and supplementary benefit while on the course as they received previously in benefit alone. Those who do not find work after training and whose circumstances are unchanged will normally get the same rate of benefit that they received before they began the course. Trainees who leave the scheme early will similarly receive the same rate of benefit as was paid before the course.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people receiving supplementary pension have had their gas bills paid directly by his Department for each of the last three years ended on 31 March.

Mr. Major: The information is as follows:

	Numbers
1982	4,000
1983	3,000
1984	5,000

The source of these figures is the annual statistical inquiry. The information relates to the number for whom these arrangements applied in December of each year and is the most recent available.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people receiving supplementary pension have had their electricity bills paid directly by his Department for each of the last three years ended on 31 March.

Mr. Major: The information is as follows:

	Numbers
1982	6,000
1983	4,000
1984	5,000

The source of these figures is the annual statistical inquiry. The information relates to the number for whom these arrangements applied in December of each year and is the most recent available.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people receiving supplementary benefit have had either their gas or electricity bills paid directly by his Department for each of the last three years ended on 31 March.

Mr. Major: The information is as follows:

	1982	*1983*	*1984*
Electricity	120,000	140,000	150,000
Gas	69,000	92,000	111,000

The source of these figures is the annual statistical inquiry. The information relates to the numbers for whom these arrangements applied in December each year and is the most recent available. Some people will have had both their electricity and gas paid direct and will therefore be included in both sets of figures.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there has been any change of policy in the last three years with regard to those receiving supplementary benefit or pension in respect of direct payment of gas and electricity bills or rent arrears; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Policy relating to the direct payment of gas and electricity for those receiving supplementary benefit is agreed by the industries concerned and the Department in the form of a joint statement of intent. This agreement has not been changed since 1982. There have been no policy changes in the arrangements for direct payment of rent arrears since the housing benefit scheme was introduced in 1982-83.

Mr. S. Grainger

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what information, which was not available at the time, he was waiting in order to respond to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate's letter of 15 September 1986 concerning his constituent Mr. S. Grainger which delayed his response until 19 January 1987.

Mr. Lyell: The delay in replying to my hon. Friend's letter was not caused by the need to obtain further information. Essential work on the reform of social security has meant that I have not been always able to reply to hon. Members' letters as quickly as I should have liked. I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in this particular case.

Social Fund

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of lack of legal cover for valid replacement of the current maternity and death grants, he will now withdraw the regulations covering the social fund.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that I made to the House yesterday.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for how many weeks running from Monday to Sunday in each of the last seven years each of the 64 weather station areas recorded a 0°C temperature.

Mr. Major: There are 63 designated weather stations which provide data for the exceptionally cold weather payments scheme. The information requested for each of these appears in the following table:

Number of weeks (Monday-Sunday) when mean weekly temperature reached or was lower than 0 °Celcius

Weather station	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Scotland							
Aberdeen Airport	0	0	5	0	2	2	3
Dumfries	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	2	1
Edinburgh Airport	0	0	5	0	2	2	3
Eskdalemuir (Galashiels)	3	2	5	1	2	4	7
Fort William	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2
Glasgow Airport	0	0	5	0	1	3	3
Kinloss (Inverness)	0	0	4	0	2	2	4
Kirkwall	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Lerwick	1	1	2	0	0	1	0
Leuchars (Dundee)	0	0	5	0	1	2	3
Machrihanish (Campbeltown)	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Prestwick (Ayr)	0	0	4	0	0	3	2
Stornoway	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Whithorn	n/a	0	1	0	0	1	0
Wick	1	1	2	0	1	1	1
England							
Aughton (Liverpool)	0	0	4	0	0	3	3
Bedford RAE	n/a	0	5	2	1	3	4
Binbrook (Hull)	0	0	4	1	1	3	4
Birmingham Airport	n/a	n/a	5	2	1	3	4
Blackpool Airport	0	0	4	0	0	3	2
Boscombe Down (Sarum)	0	0	3	0	0	3	4
Boulmer (Berwick)	0	0	3	0	0	0	1
Bournemouth Airport	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Bristol	n/a	n/a	1	0	0	2	2
Brize Norton (Oxford)	1	0	4	0	0	3	4
Carlisle	0	0	5	1	0	3	2
Chivenor (Barnstaple)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	n/a
Coltishall (Norwich)	0	0	3	0	0	3	4
Coningsby (Boston)	0	0	4	0	1	3	4
Culdrose (Penzance)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Hampstead	0	0	3	0	0	3	4
Eskmeals (Whitehaven)	0	0	2	0	0	1	1
Exeter	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Finningley (Sheffield)	0	0	5	0	2	2	4
Gatwick Airport (Guildford)	0	0	3	0	0	3	4
Heathrow Airport (London)	0	0	3	0	0	3	3
Herstmonceux (Brighton)	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
Honington (Bury St. Edmunds)	0	0	4	1	0	4	4
Leeds Weather Centre	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
Leeming (Newcastle)	0	0	5	0	1	3	5
Lyneham (Chippenham)	0	0	4	2	0	3	4
Manchester Airport	0	0	4	0	0	3	2
Manston (Dover)	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Marham (Kings Lynn)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	3	4
Mount Batten (Plymouth)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Okehampton	1	0	1	2	0	3	4
St. Mawgan (Truro)	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Shawbury (Shrewsbury)	0	0	5	2	0	3	4
Southampton Weather Centre	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Stanstead	0	0	4	0	0	3	4
Tynemouth (Sunderland)	0	0	4	0	0	0	1
Watnall (Derby)	0	0	5	2	1	3	4
Wattisham (Ipswich)	0	0	3	1	0	4	4
Whitby Coastguard	0	0	2	0	0	1	n/a
Wyton (Cambridge)	0	0	5	1	1	3	4
Yeovilton (Yeovil)	0	0	1	0	0	3	3
Wales							
Aberporth (Aberystwyth)	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Brawdy (Pembroke)	0	0	1	0	0	2	4
Cilfynydd (Merthyr Tydfil)	n/a	n/a	3	2	0	3	4
Mumbles (Swansea)	0	n/a	0	0	0	2	0
Rhoose (Cardiff)	0	0	1	0	0	3	4
Trawsfynydd (Dolgellau)	1	0	3	1	0	n/a	4
Valley (Caernarfon)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

n/a = Data not available.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will estimate the additional annual cost of extending the qualifying categories for severe weather payments to include all pensioners who are currently in receipt of any financial support from the housing benefit scheme;

(2) whether he will estimate the additional annual cost of raising the trigger temperature of severe weather payments from minus 1·5 degrees Celsius to zero degrees Celsius;

(3) whether he will estimate the cost of dispensing with the capital limit of £500 and paying severe weather payments to all pensioners in receipt of either supplementary pensions or payment of any housing benefit;

(4) whether he will estimate the cost of paying severe weather payments to all supplementary pensioners without the present application for heating having to be completed.

Mr. Major: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the annual cost of amending the scheme since actual costs will depend on the number of weather stations at which, and for how many weeks, the qualifying temperature is reached in any particular year.

If the scheme were amended to include all pensioners in receipt of standard or certificated housing benefit, with no £500 capital limit, the number in the qualifying groups would increase from approximately 1½ million to approximately 4½ million. This figure includes supplementary pensioner householders with capital in excess of £500.

Residential Homes

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much was paid by his Department to private nursing homes and residential homes as board and lodging allowances for residents in these homes in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1984.

Mr. Major: People in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes can claim supplementary benefit to help meet the fees. The amount of supplementary benefit paid to people in all of these homes in 1979 was £10 million and in 1984 £200 million. Separate information on the amount of benefit paid to people in private homes alone is not available.

Sex Equality

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to lay the regulations amending the Social Security (Hospital In-Patients) Regulations 1975 to provide for the equal treatment of men and women.

Mr. Major: I have today laid the Social Security (Hospital In-Patients) Amendment Regulations 1987 which come into effect on Friday 13 February and ensure that men and women are treated equally under the rules governing the adjustment of benefits for those undergoing treatment as hospital in-patients. These amended rules fulfil the terms of European Community Directive 79/7 EEC and we expect to be able to identify and pay arrears to virtually all those married women and some men who experienced a reduction of retirement pension, invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance in the period since 22 December 1984 when the Directive took effect.

As part of our programme for the review and simplification of the benefits system we shall shortly be putting to the Social Security Advisory Committee proposals for changes in the existing rules on the adjustment of benefits in payment to hospital in-patients which in their present form are complex and difficult to administer.

Midwives

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many midwives are currently employed in each district health authority area, and how far short this is of full establishment in each area.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1986, c. *217*]: The number of midwives (including midwifery students) in whole-time equivalent terms employed in each district health authority at 30 September 1985 (the latest date for which such detail is available) is given in the table.

Information on establishments is not collected centrally. However, I am aware of the results of a survey of a sample of health authorities in England conducted for the review body for nursing staff, midwifery and health visitors which showed that at 31 March 1985 only about 3 per cent. of whole-time equivalent funded posts for qualified midwives remained vacant for over three months, compared with the average of 2·5 per cent. for all nursing and midwifery staff.

Midwifery staff (excluding agency staff) in post at 30 September 1985—Whole time equivalents

District Health Authorities	*Numbers*
Wessex Regional Health Authority	
East Dorset	150
West Dorset	70
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	250
Southampton and South West Hampshire	240
Winchester	110
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	90
Salisbury	70
Swindon	140
Bath	170
Isle of Wight	60
Total	1,330
Oxford Regional Health Authority	
East Berkshire	190
West Berkshire	200
Aylesbury Vale	50
Wycombe	140
Milton Keynes	80
Kettering	120
Northampton	170
Oxfordshire	240
Total	1,200
South Western Regional Health Authority	
Bristol and Weston	180
Frenchay	20
Southmead	180
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	140
Exeter	110
North Devon	40
Plymouth	200
Torbay	60
Cheltenham	90
Gloucester	130
Somerset	150
Total	1,290
West Midland Regional Health Authority	
Bromsgrove and Redditch	60
Herefordshire	50
Kidderminster and District	30
Worcester and District	100
Shropshire	150
Mid-Staffordshire	90
North Staffordshire	240

District Health Authorities	Numbers
South East Staffordshire	90
Rugby	40
North Warwickshire	120
South Warwickshire	80
Central Birmingham	250
East Birmingham	20
North Birmingham	160
South Birmingham	110
West Birmingham	140
Coventry	180
Dudley	110
Sandwell	70
Solihull	190
Walsall	130
Wolverhampton	180
Total	2,570
Northern Regional Health Authority	
Hartlepool	50
North Tees	100
South Tees	160
East Cumbria	70
South Cumbria	50
West Cumbria	80
Darlington	70
Durham	90
North West Durham	40
South West Durham	80
Northumberland	120
Gateshead	70
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	230
North Tyneside	60
South Tyneside	60
Sunderland	180
Total	1,500
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	
Hull	120
East Yorkshire	60
Grimsby	90
Scunthorpe	60
Northallerton	20
York	120
Scarborough	40
Harrogate	60
Bradford	220
Airedale	90
Calderdale	110
Huddersfield	100
Dewsbury	110
Leeds Western	160
Leeds Eastern	210
Wakefield	110
Pontefract	120
Total	1,810
Trent Regional Health Authority	
North Derbyshire	130
South Derbyshire	170
Leicestershire	380
North Lincolnshire	100
South Lincolnshire	130
Bassetlaw	30
Central Nottinghamshire	160
Nottingham	360
Barnsley	100
Doncaster	150
Rotherham	120
Sheffield	320
Total	2,160
East Anglian Regional Health Authority	
Cambridge	160
Peterborough	120
East Suffolk	110
West Suffolk	150
Norwich	240
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	50
West Norfolk and Wisbech	80
Huntingdon	50
Total	950
North West Thames Regional Health Authority	
North Bedfordshire	130
South Bedfordshire	140
North Hertfordshire	100
East Hertfordshire	90
North West Hertfordshire	110
South West Hertfordshire	80
Barnet	140
Harrow	130
Hillingdon	70
Hounslow and Spelthorne	140
Ealing	90
Brent	50
Paddington and North Kensington	110
Hammersmith and Fulham	50
Victoria	60
Total	1,470
North East Thames Regional Health Authority	
Basildon and Thurrock	140
Mid Essex	100
North East Essex	120
West Essex	120
Southend	110
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	170
Hampstead	50
Bloomsbury	70
Islington	140
City and Hackney	160
Newham	90
Tower Hamlets	100
Enfield	110
Haringey	90
Redbridge	140
Waltham Forest	130
Total	1,830
South East Thames Regional Health Authority	
Brighton	70
Eastbourne	60
Hastings	80
South East Kent	100
Canterbury and Thanet	110
Dartford and Gravesham	100
Maidstone	60
Medway	200
Tunbridge Wells	120
Bexley	130
Greenwich	140
Bromley	160
West Lambeth	110
Camberwell	130
Lewisham and North Southwark	140
Total	1,700
South West Thames Regional Health Authority	
North West Surrey	120
West Surrey and North East Hants	100
South West Surrey	60
Mid-Surrey	80
East Surrey	40
Chichester	60
Mid-Downs	120
Worthing	70

District Health Authorities	Numbers
Croydon	140
Kingston and Esher	100
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	50
Wandsworth	160
Merton and Sutton	110
Total	1,200
Mersey Regional Health Authority	
Chester	140
Crewe	100
Halton	20
Macclesfield	60
Warrington	100
Liverpool	290
St. Helens with Knowsley	150
Sefton North	40
Sefton South	140
Wirral	180
Total	1,200
North Western Regional Health Authority	
Lancaster	70
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde	120
Preston	150
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	150
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	160
West Lancashire	40
Chorley and South Ribble	40
Bolton	170
Bury	90
North Manchester	110
Central Manchester	170
South Manchester	170
Oldham	120
Rochdale	110
Salford (T)	170
Stockport	160
Tameside and Glossop	130
Trafford	70
Wigan	160
Total	2,390

Notes

(1) The figures shown include midwives both in the hospital and community services and midwifery students.

(2) All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 10 whole time equivalents.

(3) District figures do not include staff in London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities.

Hillingdon Health Authority

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the extent to which the funding of Hillingdon health authority has changed in real terms between 1982-83 and 1986-87, taking account of (i) changes in demography, (ii) medical technology and (iii) the effects of national and regional reallocation processes.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1986, c. *708*]: Between 1982-83 and 1985-86* revenue expenditure by Hillingdon health authority increased by 2·6 per cent. in real terms, as measured by the gross domestic product deflator. I regret that information is not available on the costs of demographic change and advances in medical technology at district level.

* Figures for 1986-87 not available.

Private Patients

Mr. John Browne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish for each health authority in England the number of cases and the average length of stay for each of private patients and National Health Service patients for each specialty covered by National Health Service statistical returns.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1986, c. *209*]: I am sorry I cannot give my hon. Friend all the information he seeks. Information at district level can be obtained only at disproportionate cost and the numbers in the central data sample are too small for reliable estimates to be made for private patients in most specialties at regional level. The available information is given in the following table:

Estimated number of discharges and mean duration of stay (days) of National Health Service and private patients from National Health Service non-psychiatric and non-maternity hospitals, by specialty, England 1984

		National Health Service Patients							
	England	*Northern RHA*	*Yorkshire RHA*	*Trent RHA*	*East Anglian RHA*	*North West Thames RHA*	*North East Thames RHA*	*South East Thames RHA*	*South West Thames RHA*
General medicine									
Estimated number	848,070	68,050	61,710	77,830	25,030	62,680	80,660	69,540	41,810
Mean duration of stay	10·2	10·2	10·3	8·3	8·9	11·8	12·5	10·8	10·7
Paediatrics									
Estimated number	303,600	22,100	21,760	25,820	9,010	24,760	23,570	25,770	14,190
Mean duration of stay	3·9	4·6	4·6	3·9	2·8	3·3	3·4	4·1	3·4
Infectious diseases									
Estimated number	23,620	740	4,880	2,320	370	610	4,310	2,280	1,840
Mean duration of stay	7·1	5·4	7·1	7·3	3·8	10·1	9·1	5·1	4·6
Diseases of the chest									
Estimated number	62,640	3,470	4,440	4,870	2,570	3,710	6,270	4,360	1,630
Mean duration of stay	11·8	9·2	14·1	11·7	9·4	10·8	12·2	11·9	10·3
Dermatology									
Estimated number	21,100	2,000	2,890	2,240	480	1,090	1,090	2,050	470
Mean duration of stay	19·9	14·9	18·3	16·9	23·3	18·4	21·3	19·6	19·6

National Health Service Patients

	England	*Northern RHA*	*Yorkshire RHA*	*Trent RHA*	*East Anglian RHA*	*North West Thames RHA*	*North East Thames RHA*	*South East Thames RHA*	*South West Thames RHA*
Neurology									
Estimated number	42,930	3,180	3,260	2,720	1,350	1,810	4,820	2,240	2,940
Mean duration of stay	12·4	13·4	11·2	8·6	8·8	21·5	16·1	11·9	10·3
Cardiology									
Estimated Number	54,370	2,910	5,670	3,470	1,650	5,530	4,250	7,320	320
Mean duration of stay	6·7	6·2	6·5	4·7	6·1	7·4	6·6	7·2	5·7
Rehabilitation									
Estimated Number	8,300	660	50	1,170	1,150	1,080	1,560	60	1,060
Mean duration of stay	31·3	23·1	33·8	40·7	22·5	32·6	24·4	17·5	27·3
Genito-urinary medicine									
Estimated Number	460	10	30	90	—	20	180	—	—
Mean duration of stay	5·4	14·0	2·7	5·8	—	2·0	8·1	—	—
Rheumatology									
Estimated Number	27,320	2,180	2,920	2,340	1,610	1,340	1,440	2,490	790
Mean duration of stay	18·0	17·8	17·4	15·2	17·8	17·7	19·7	14·9	16·0
Geriatric medicine									
Estimated Number	332,710	17,420	39,010	35,800	15,940	19,550	22,370	27,410	19,870
Mean duration of stay	55·0	54·6	41·2	55·9	49·2	73·6	73·0	53·1	48·7
Units for younger disabled									
Estimated Number	4,740	300	870	810	220	240	390	460	300
Mean duration of stay	147·1	117·6	81·2	31·9	45·2	268·8	261·4	180·7	17·8
General surgery									
Estimated Number	971,780	66,490	71,340	93,630	40,600	70,600	90,610	80,500	56,730
Mean duration of stay	7·1	7·4	7·6	6·3	7·1	7·6	8·0	7·0	7·2
Ear, Nose and Throat									
Estimated Number	257,960	15,920	20,740	23,120	11,660	17,040	26,230	21,390	14,090
Mean duration of stay	3·5	3·2	3·4	3·4	2·8	3·7	4·0	3·6	3·3
Orthopaedic surgery									
Estimated Number	500,300	33,190	44,560	44,240	17,810	34,970	39,430	38,310	28,990
Mean duration of stay	11·1	12·0	10·3	11·1	10·7	11·3	13·5	11·4	11·7
Ophthalmology									
Estimated Number	135,540	8,240	10,050	12,750	6,610	7,240	7,760	10,590	7,140
Mean duration of stay	5·7	4·7	6·4	5·9	4·8	6·2	6·2	6·0	5·4
Radiotherapy									
Estimated Number	59,310	3,760	3,260	7,010	2,680	4,540	6,990	2,590	1,540
Mean duration of stay	10·5	10·3	12·9	12·0	11·0	9·0	11·9	11·8	9·4
Urology									
Estimated Number	146,460	8,000	15,560	9,970	8,460	7,110	18,450	14,710	8,220
Mean duration of stay	6·7	6·1	6·8	7·1	5·8	6·8	7·2	6·6	5·9
Plastic surgery									
Estimated Number	53,500	6,360	5,090	4,580	1,720	3,270	4,040	3,260	1,970
Mean duration of stay	7·2	6·4	5·6	7·2	7·2	8·0	6·5	8·5	6·0
Thoracic surgery									
Estimated Number	39,970	2,300	3,750	3,590	1,040	3,150	2,500	2,840	670
Mean duration of stay	10·7	10·5	11·3	10·9	8·6	11·3	12·5	10·4	11·9
Oral surgery									
Estimated Number	86,700	3,800	7,570	6,310	4,460	8,260	9,170	7,770	5,190
Mean duration of stay	2·5	3·1	2·0	2·2	2·1	2·8	2·5	2·6	3·0
Orthodontics									
Estimated Number	250	30	—	50	—	—	20	20	10
Mean duration of stay	4·0	0·3	—	1·2	—	—	14·0	2·0	2·0
Neurosurgery									
Estimated Number	29,290	2,110	4,040	2,020	1,610	500	2,830	1,060	1,950
Mean duration of stay	11·8	15·0	9·0	13·7	7·6	10·9	17·8	14·2	10·1

	National Health Service Patients									
	England	*Northern RHA*	*Yorkshire RHA*	*Trent RHA*	*East Anglian RHA*	*North West Thames RHA*	*North East Thames RHA*	*South East Thames RHA*	*South West Thames RHA*
Gynaecology									
Estimated Number	552,690	35,540	41,620	59,150	23,440	39,620	36,520	42,690	27,900
Mean duration of stay	4·1	4·0	4·6	3·9	3·6	4·0	4·3	3·9	4·3
Special Care Baby Unit									
Estimated Number	61,780	3,890	6,620	4,940	2,100	4,780	5,120	4,790	3,210
Mean duration of stay	10·7	9·4	10·7	11·5	8·7	9·7	11·3	11·6	7·7
General Practice (Other)									
Estimated Number	90,000	6,270	4,700	6,790	3,760	2,540	3,680	5,850	5,900
Mean duration of stay	20·3	19·2	14·8	21·9	16·9	32·9	20·6	21·4	22·6
General Practice (Dental)									
Estimated Number	930	—	30	10	—	—	—	70	670
Mean duration of stay	1·6	—	0·3	1·0	—	—	—	1·1	1·7
All other Specialties									
Estimated Number	167,340	9,650	18,980	12,060	6,210	11,540	13,700	17,630	4,130
Mean duration of stay	7·0	6·9	7·1	5·8	6·6	6·9	6·6	8·6	3·5

	National Health Service Patients							*Private patients England*
	Wessex RHA	*Oxford RHA*	*South Western RHA*	*West Midlands RHA*	*Mersey RHA*	*North Western RHA*	*Special Health Authority*	
General medicine								
Estimated number	43,360	38,880	46,420	85,340	46,690	94,430	5,640	4,850
Mean duration of stay	10·1	8·2	8·5	9·8	10·6	10·0	7·8	6·2
Paediatrics								
Estimated number	14,700	15,270	19,270	31,360	18,920	35,540	1,560	450
Mean duration of stay	4·4	3·5	3·7	4·0	4·1	4·0	7·1	6·2
Infectious diseases								
Estimate number	20	540	690	1,020	980	3,000	20	70
Mean duration of stay	26·0	7·1	9·4	6·9	8·9	6·1	30·0	6·1
Diseases of the chest								
Estimated number	1,880	2,790	3,040	6,870	2,340	6,180	8,220	740
Mean duration of stay	11·0	12·6	13·8	14·0	16·9	12·2	8·0	8·0
Dermatology								
Estimated number	920	880	1,300	2,820	1,030	1,660	180	130
Mean duration of stay	39·7	24·7	16·6	19·5	25·2	20·4	8·1	14·5
Neurology								
Estimated number	1,630	2,760	2,240	4,710	2,030	4,180	3,060	1,030
Mean duration of stay	12·5	21·6	12·3	10·4	6·7	10·2	10·5	6·6
Cardiology								
Estimated Number	1,240	1,570	440	5,690	2,910	6,410	4,990	1,100
Mean duration of stay	7·5	5·0	5·7	6·7	9·3	5·9	7·7	3·9
Rehabilitation								
Estimated Number	630	450	—	—	110	320	—	30
Mean duration of stay	22·1	23·3	—	—	97·8	95·1	—	17·3
Genito-urinary medicine								
Estimated Number	—	—	4	9	—	—	—	10
Mean duration of stay	—	—	5·0	0·8	—	—	—	3·0
Rheumatology								
Estimated Number	1,880	1,610	1,790	2,210	750	3,610	360	340
Mean duration of stay	22·7	13·9	13·7	21·8	23·6	21·5	9·5	10·8
Geriatric medicine								
Estimated Number	13,490	15,670	21,280	29,030	18,330	36,800	740	90
Mean duration of stay	61·7	41·4	56·4	68·8	66·6	41·4	63·0	19·7
Units for younger disabled								
Estimated Number	60	10	290	210	130	450	—	—
Mean duration of stay	13·5	4·0	46·1	1,156·4	185·7	42·7	—	—

	National Health Service Patients							Private patients England
	Wessex RHA	Oxford RHA	South Western RHA	West Midlands RHA	Mersey RHA	North Western RHA	Special Health Authority	
General surgery								
Estimated Number	48,030	46,890	57,850	91,310	50,960	102,200	4,040	13,180
Mean duration of stay	6·9	5·8	7·0	6·8	8·0	7·1	7·8	6·2
Ear, Nose and Throat								
Estimated Number	12,750	14,280	14,940	24,500	13,110	27,360	830	6,300
Mean duration of stay	3·8	2·6	4·2	3·4	4·0	3·4	5·4	2·6
Orthopaedic surgery								
Estimated Number	28,680	29,290	30,910	58,370	24,180	45,380	1,990	8,680
Mean duration of stay	10·8	8·1	10·3	10·3	11·4	12·5	6·9	6·8
Ophthalmology								
Estimated Number	7,730	4,950	8,700	13,850	6,570	14,750	8,610	4,630
Mean duration of stay	7·2	4·4	5·6	6·2	5·7	5·9	4·3	3·1
Radiotheraphy								
Estimated Number	2,590	3,130	5,840	4,970	3,970	4,910	1,530	1,600
Mean duration of stay	10·1	9·3	8·5	6·0	12·9	12·2	8·0	7·5
Urology								
Estimated Number	7,520	2,890	8,300	14,730	5,000	15,710	1,830	3,150
Mean duration of stay	5·8	4·3	6·4	7·3	8·5	7·0	7·7	4·7
Plastic surgery								
Estimated Number	2,180	4,490	3,360	4,260	2,760	5,430	730	1,080
Mean duration of stay	12·2	6·8	8·5	7·3	5·4	7·9	5·6	3·2
Thoracic surgery								
Estimated Number	960	120	3,050	4,310	1,790	6,870	3,030	1,820
Mean duration of stay	6·4	4·0	9·3	9·3	10·0	11·1	13·2	11·1
Oral surgery								
Estimated Number	4,140	4,430	5,650	6,720	4,080	8,910	240	2,230
Mean duration of stay	2·9	2·2	2·2	1·9	2·7	2·6	2·8	2·0
Orthodontics								
Estimated Number	—	—	70	—	40	10	—	—
Mean duration of stay	—	—	4·6	—	4·8	9·0	—	—
Neurosurgery								
Estimated Number	740	1,210	2,120	3,390	1,700	2,930	1,080	1,280
Mean duration of stay	16·4	8·6	10·3	8·1	15·0	13·1	10·8	9·4
Gynaecology								
Estimated Number	28,710	25,430	33,190	50,360	25,830	57,610	5,080	8,150
Mean duration of stay	4·6	3·4	4·0	4·2	4·7	4·2	3·8	3·9
Special Care Baby Unit								
Estimated Number	2,860	2,250	2,160	8,070	3,970	6,110	910	40
Mean duration of stay	12·5	11·4	11·5	9·3	9·0	12·9	18·1	13·8
General Practice (Other)								
Estimated Number	9,800	6,980	18,950	10,220	2,740	1,820	—	80
Mean duration of stay	20·9	20·1	18·4	17·1	23·6	39·2	—	14·8
General Practice (Dental)								
Estimated Number	100	—	5	—	—	—	—	2
Mean duration of stay	1·9	—	1·4	—	—	—	—	1·0
All other Specialties								
Estimated Number	6,510	1,010	11,760	4,940	20,540	13,140	15,540	2,980
Mean duration of stay	6·1	24·2	6·9	7·7	5·3	6·5	8·8	7·6

NHS (Property Sales)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all surplus National Health Service property sold since 1979 in excess of £50,000, the price obtained and the date of sale.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 12 January 1987, c. *123*]: The information requested is set out in the following table. It is taken from returns sent to the Department by regional health authorities at the end of each financial year

and does not include transactions of under 1 acre. All proceeds from disposals are retained by health authorities and used for reinvestment in the service.

1979-80

Property and Address	*Date of Sale*	*Price obtained* £
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. 133 Holgate Road and Yearsley Bridge Hospital, Huntington Road, York	April 1979	240,000
2. St. John's Hospital, Keighley (part)	May 1979	100,000
3. Fairfield Hospital, York	July 1979	60,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Former Swithland Recovery Home, Leicestershire	September 1979	92,500
2. Former Seely House Convalescent Home, Skegness	March 1980	90,000
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Colney Park, St. Albans	not given	53,000
2. Clare Hall, Barnet (part)	not given	360,000
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Connaught Hospital	April 1979	365,000
2. Land at Chingford Hospital	April 1979	1,125,000
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Gildridge Hospital, Eastbourne	April 1979	58,000
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Battersea General Hospital	December 1979	265,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Northlands Maternity Hospital	August 1979	175,000
2. Leigh House, Bradford-on-Avon	February 1980	125,000
3. Land at Roman Road/Kingsclere Road, Bishopstoke	November 1980	820,000
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. St. Lukes, Maidenhead	not given	360,000
2. Margaret Spencer Hospital	April 1979	170,000
3. Pitsford House Hospital 5 lots	not given	not given
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Moretonhampstead Convalescent Home	January 1980	66,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Stratford Children's Hospital, Stratford-on-Avon	September 1979	92,500
2. Former Royal Salop Infirmary, Shrewsbury	March 1980	185,000
3. Overslade Manor, Rugby	June 1979	80,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Wolstenholme Hospital, Norden Rochdale	October 1979	100,000

1980-81

Property and Address	*Date of Sale*	*Price obtained* £
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Sandal Grange Hospital, Wakefield	January 1980	73,000
2. Eskdale Hospital, Whitby	not given	75,000
3. Gateforth Hospital, Selby	December 1980	121,000
4. East Ayton Lodge, Scarborough—Plot A & B	September 1980	83,000
5. Cowder Ghyll Hospital Site, Skipton	November 1980	55,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Former Hollow Meadows Hospital, Sheffield	January 1981	88,273
2. Land at Bretby Hall Hospital, near Burton-on-Trent	September 1980	128,900
3. Former Royal Hospital, Sheffield	November 1980	350,000
4. Thundercliffe Grange, Rotherham	May 1980	65,000
5. Former Woodlands Court Hospital, Boston	February 1981	55,328
6. Ruddington Hall Hospital, Nottinghamshire	November 1980	253,000
7. Former Holbrook Maternity Home, Derbyshire	June 1980	130,000
8. Branston Hall Estate, Lincolnshire—Partly sold	August/October 1980	118,000
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Hertingfordbury Road, Hertfordshire	September 1980	60,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
2. Pinehill Hospital	December 1980	350,000
3. Ware Park Hospital Site, Hertfordshire	May 1980	290,000
4. Tolmers Park, Hertfordshire	November 1980	288,000
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Poplar Hall Farm	November 1980	350,000
2. Little Mollands Farm—Lot 4	December 1980	66,000
3. Metropolitan Hospital	April 1980	not given
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Downside Hospital, Eastbourne	July 1980	235,000
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Broome Close, Cobham	May 1980	340,000
2. Belmont Hospital, Sutton	September 1980	2,702,717
3. Brooklands Day Training Centre	June 1980	64,468
4. St. George's Wood Annexe and Lodge, Haslemere	September 1980	128,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Old Park House, Devizes—6 Lots	not given	150,000
2. Portsmouth Eye and Ear Hospital	April 1980	not given
3. Herrison Hospital, Farm Land	June 1980	197,900
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Didcot	October 1980	370,000
2. Cippenham Hostel	October 1980	490,000
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Moorhaven Hospital, South Devon—Farm No. 1	September 1980	70,000
—Farm No. 2	February 1981	107,000
2. Bursledon House, Dawlish	March 1981	50,000
3. Land at Tone Vale Hospital, Somerset	March 1981	not given
4. Coldharbour Farm, Bristol (Stoke Park Hospital)	September 1980	1,000,000
5. Old Tree Maternity Home, Launceston	December 1980	111,000
6. Berwick Lodge, Avon	March 1981	60,000
7. Frenchay Hospital, Avon	September 1980	75,000
8. R. D. & E. Southernay Hospital, Exeter	March 1981	300,000
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Thelwall Grange, Warrington	January 1981	95,000
2. Warrington Infirmary	January 1981	97,750
3. Thingwall Hospital	November 1980	225,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Peel Street Clinic	February 1981	128,000

1981-82

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
Northern Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Wooley Hospital, Hexham	March 1982	75,000
2. Cleadon Park Hospital, South Shields	October 1981	290,000
3. Seaham Hall Hospital, Seaham	May 1981	62,500
4. Lee Hill Hospital, Lanchester	June 1981	142,750
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Clifton Hospital, York (Agricultural land)	March 1982	75,000
2. County Hospital, York—Buildings & Site	February 1982	605,178
3. Whixley Hospital—Farm Land	July 1981	54,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Conisborough Hospital, Conisborough	November 1981	80,200
2. Land at St. John's Hospital, Lincoln	February 1982	99,000
3. 2 Houses and Land at Branston Hall Estate, Lincolnshire	March 1982	236,500
4. Bromhead Nursing Home, Nettleham Road, Lincolnshire	December 1981	225,000
5. Wales Court, Kiveton, Sheffield	September 1981	123,000
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Harperbury Civil Defence Buildings, Hertfordshire	not given	60,000
2. King Edward Memorial Hospital (Part)	not given	625,000
3. Land at Shenley	November 1981	275,000
4. St Columbas Hospital, NW3	not given	2,600,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
5. Ware Park, South Lodge, Hertfordshire	June 1981	72,000
6. Daneswood Convalescent Home	November 1981	243,000
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. South Ockendon—Lots 1 & 2 Farm and Buildings	June 1981	115,000
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Lenham Hospital, Lenham, Kent	September 1981	not given
2. Cray Valley Hospital, Orpington	March 1982	not given
3. Land at Foredown Hospital, Brighton	December 1981	not given
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Royal Portsmouth Hospital	April 1981	130,000
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. St. Georges, Wallingford	December 1981	322,000
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Saltford House, Bristol	August 1981	161,000
2. North Devon Infirmary—2 Houses	June 1981	61,000
—Main Hospital	July 1981	85,000
3. Tone Vale, Farmland, Somerset	April 1981	80,000
4. Langdon Hospital—Main Farm	February 1982	225,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Romsley Hill Hospital, Halesowen	September 1981	210,000
2. Midland Hospital, Knowle	December 1981	217,000
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Caldy Manor Hospital—Lot 1	September 1981	145,000
—Lot 2	September 1981	95,000
2. Wrenbury Hall	not given	87,500
3. David Lewis Northern Hospital	December 1981	69,505
4. Crewe Memorial Hospital	not given	190,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Whittingham Hospital—Lot 1	June 1981	155,000
—Lot 2	July 1981	56,125
—Lot 3	July 1981	255,000
2. Wilkinson Hospital Bolton	August 1981	575,400

1982-83

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
Northern Regional Health Authority		
1. Overdene Maternity Home, Saltburn	March 1983	92,500
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Haigh Hospital, Leeds	June 1982	215,000
2. Killingbeck Hospital, Leeds—Land	April 1982	1,150,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Park House, 369 Woodborough Road, Nottingham	June 1982	162,000
2. The Doctors House and Land at Branston Hall Estate, Lincolnshire	March 1983	125,500
3. The Royal Infirmary, Sheffield	September 1982	250,000
4. The Cedars and Woodthorpe Hospitals, Nottingham	February 1983	175,000
5. Albolton Hall, Nottingham	May 1982	85,100
6. Moorgate Hospital, Rotherham	July 1982	192,000
7. Parwich Hospital, Parwich, Derbyshire	—	—
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
1. St. Peters Hospital, Potters Way, Peterborough	July 1982	not given
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Land and Sportsfield at Hill End Hospital	March 1983	not given
2. King Edward Memorial Hospital (remainder of site)	April 1982	not given
3. Temple Hill House	September 1982	not given
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Barker House—Lot 1	not given	not given
2. London Jewish Hospital	not given	600,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Hothfield Hospital, Ashford	April 1982	138,687
2. Bexhill Convalescent Home	March 1983	306,000
3. St. Martin's Canterbury, Kent	January 1983	not given
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Bunch Lane, Haslemere	October 1982	not given
2. Schiff Hospital, Cobham	May 1982	400,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Devizes Maternity Hospital	September 1982	not given
2. Land at Arches Lane, Malmesbury	December 1982	not given
3. Parcel of Land at King George V Memorial Nurses' Home	March 1982	not given
4. Parcel of Land at St. Leonard's Hospital, Ringwood	March 1983	not given
5. Fred Woolley House, Chilworth, Southampton—Land required for M27 Slip Road (Transferred to DOE/T)	not given	not given
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. Warren Hospital	not given	585,000
2. Rockingham Road, Hospital	not given	92,500
3. Creaton Hospital	not given	150,000
4. Rambler House, Maidenhead	not given	575,000
5. Wellingborough Cottage Hospital	not given	140,000
6. Fairmile Hospital	April 1982	158,000
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Alexandra Hospital, Barnstaple	August 1982	95,500
2. Ham Green Hospital, Avon—Lot 2	August 1982	86,000
3. Morwenstow, Exeter	May 1982	180,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Bromsgrove	not given	not given
2. Land at Deer Moss Hospital, Shropshire	June 1982	60,000
3. Oversley House, Alcester	September 1982	132,500
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Sankey Isolation Hospital	January 1983	185,000
2. Parkside Hospital, Nursery	not given	280,000
3. Charles Wilson Hostel	September 1982	55,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Land adjacent to Albert House, Haverbreaks	January 1983	50,150
2. Lostock Hall, Continuation Hospital, Preston	July 1982	117,500

1983-84

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
Northern Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Benfield Road, Newcastle	June 1983	74,500
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Baghill House Estate, Pontefract—Land	January 1984	52,275
2. Broadgate Hospital, Beverley—Land	April 1983	155,000
3. Thistle Hill Hospital, Knaresborough	December 1983	59,700
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Ashton Hall, Derbyshire—Lot 1	December 1983	not given
2. The Women's Hospital, Nottingham	June 1983	220,000
3. The Firs Hospital, Nottingham	July 1983	212,753
4. Welborne, 222 Graham Road, Sheffield	February 1984	191,000
5. Storth Oakes, 229 Graham Road, Sheffield	April 1984	150,000
6. Site of the former Westdale Hospital, Nottingham	May 1983	75,000
7. The Retreat Hostel, Nottingham	November 1983	51,250
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
1. Great Yarmouth and Gorleston General Hospital and No. 89/95 St. George's Road	February 1984	not given
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Western Hospital, Seagrave Road, SW6	August 1983	5,386,000
2. Children's Annexe, Luton	June 1983	262,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Maternity Hospital, Plaistow	December 1983	90,000
2. Rye Street Hospital, Bishop's Stortford	June 1983	not given
3. Aldersbrook Hospital	August 1983	875,000
4. Warley	not given	not given
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Clerks Craft, Bletchingley	December 1983	1,000,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Basing Road Hospital site	October 1983	225,000
2. Land at Frogwell Hospital	April 1983	144,000
3. Farm Land at Knowle Hospital with 1 cottage	June 1983	263,551
4. Haybrook House and associated land and buildings, Pewsey	November 1983	175,000
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. Health Centre site, Kettering	not given	120,049
2. Land at St. Johns	not given	153,920
3. Borocourt Land	not given	50,000
4. St. Mary's, Wallingford	not given	not given
5. Hitcham House, Burnham	June 1983	266,194
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Farm and Lake, Tehidy Hospital, Camborne	July 1983	not given
2. Boskear House, Boundary Road, Bodmin	November 1983	not given
3. Devonport Maternity Hospital, Plymouth	April 1983	not given
4. Over Hospital, Gloucester—(Agricultural Land)	June 1983	not given
5. St. John's Hospital Administration Block, Axbridge	May 1983	50,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Barnsley Hall Farm, Bromsgrove (10 houses affected by M42, sold to DOT)	February 1984	203,000
2. Land at Wordsley, Dudley	November 1983	963,750
3. Standon Hall, Staffordshire	October 1983	265,000
4. Groundslow Hospital, Staffordshire	December 1983	225,000
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Wallasey Women's Hospital	not given	75,000
2. Moss House	not given	165,000
3. White City, Winwick—Land (Plot A)	not given	297,988
4. Davenham Hospital (Lot 1)	not given	65,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Lyndhurst Nurses' Home, Stockport	March 1984	105,000
National Heart and Chest Hospitals Special Health Authority		
1. Land at Brompton Hospital, Frimley	not given	4,700,000
Hammersmith Special Health Authority		
1. 0·642 acres	not given	92,000

1984-85

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
Northern Regional Health Authority		
1. Devonshire Road Hospital	October 1984	187,000
2. Aldingham Hall Hospital	January 1985	128,000
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Carr Gate Hospital	September 1984	100,000
2. Hatfeild Hall	March 1985	120,000
3. Warley House Land (4 plots)	not given	51,500
4. Clifton & Fairfield Hospitals—Land	January 1985	99,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Foxby Hill Hospital, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	November 1984	70,942
2. Ashgate Maternity Home, Chesterfield, Derbyshire	February 1985	170,000
3. Draycott Hospital, Derbyshire	September 1984	167,500
4. Hawthorne House, Middlewood, Sheffield	April 1984	60,000
5. Mortomley Hall, Sheffield	June 1984	75,000
6. Land at Mapperley Hospital, Nottingham	March 1985	587,535

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
7. Aughton Court Hospital, Rotherham	March 1985	191,250
8. Rosehill Hospital, Rawmarsh, Rotherham	October 1984	182,000
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
1. Maternity Hospital, Mill Road, Cambridge	April 1984	705,000
2. Ipswich Smallpox Hospital	April 1984	80,000
3. Addenbrooke's Hospital (Old Site) Trumpington Street, Cambridge	March 1985	5,750,000
4. Huntingdon County Hospital	November 1984	285,000
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Finchley	May 1984	1,075,325
2. Neasden Hospital, NW10 (Land South of Mitchell Brook)	October 1984	1,987,178
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Ongar War Memorial	August 1984	150,000
2. Wickham Road, Witham	July 1984	301,000
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Willesborough Hospital, Ashford	April 1984	170,000
2. Princess Mary's Hospital, Margate	June 1984	238,000
3. Mansell House, Bexhill	October 1984	676,000
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. High Meadow, Dorking	April 1984	511,600
2. Forest Hospital, Horsham	January 1985	2,200,000
3. Wimbledon Hospital, SW20	May 1984	1,800,000
4. 19-23 Copse Hill, SW20	May 1984	1,000,000
5. St. Benedict's Hospital, SW17	November 1984	2,200,000
6. Weir Hospital, London SW12	April 1984	675,000
7. St. Benedict's Hill House	January 1985	366,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Winchfield Hospital, Winchfield	April 1984	512,000
2. Part of Alton General Hospital, Alton	October 1984	702,500
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. Winslow Hospital	November 1984	178,127
2. Cowley Road Hospital	March 1985	675,000
3. Nurses Home, Cranwell	March 1985	66,250
4. Danetre Hospital	March 1985	225,000
5. Fircroft, 41 Hightown Road, Banbury	March 1985	134,381
6. Style Acre	March 1985	119,194
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Rockhall House, Bath Avon	December 1984	350,000
2. Headlands Hotel, Torquay	not given	350,000
3. Land at Lyngford House, Taunton	March 1985	914,000
4. Leigh Court Hospital, Bristol	March 1985	750,000
5. Stoke Park Hospital, Playing Fields, Bristol	January 1985	100,000
6. Shute Shelve Hospital, Axbridge	November 1984	200,000
7. Sandhill Park House, Somerset	May 1984	75,000
8. Brislington House, Bristol	November 1984	750,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Limes Hospital Site and Hospital Buildings, Himley —Lot 1	March 1985	127,750
2. Prestwood Hospital, Complex, near Stourbridge—Lot 1	March 1985	173,501
3. Bedwardine House, Rushwick, Worcester	not given	92,250
4. South Bank Nursing Home, Worcester	May 1984	280,000
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Collar House, Prestbury, Cheshire	not given	390,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Offerton House, Hospital	December 1984	265,000
2. Land at Prestwich Hospital—Lot 1	not given	62,000
—Lot 2	not given	70,000
Hammersmith & Queen Charlotte's Special Health Authority		
1. Croft Court	not given	214,000
2. Burlington House	not given	330,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
National Heart & Chest Hospitals Special Health Authority		
1. Land at Brompton Hospital, Frimley (Site transferred to South West Thames Regional Health Authority)	not given	3,400,000

1985-86

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
1. Woodgates Maternity Home	March 1986	290,000
Trent Regional Health Authority		
1. Markfield Hospital, Leicestershire	November 1985	346,989
2. The Nurses Home, Bretby Hall Hospital, Derbyshire	December 1985	86,500
3. Debdale Hall Recovery Hospital, Nottinghamshire	May 1985	152,000
4. The Lawn Hospital, Lincoln	March 1986	425,000
5. Ellen Towle Recovery Home, Leicestershire	January 1986	125,500
6. Morton Hospital, Derbyshire	December 1985	110,000
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
1. Blofield Hall, Norfolk	September 1985	250,000
2. Longacre Maternity Home, West Runton, Cromer	April 1985	129,500
3. Home Place, Convalescent Home, Holt	November 1985	207,000
4. Hampshire House, Nurses Home, Cromer	February 1986	75,000
5. Land at Fulbourn Hospital, Cambridge	January 1986	1,329,900
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Houndswood House, Hertfordshire	July 1985	350,000
2. Rockleigh, Hertfordshire	November 1985	150,000
Nurse Training School, Hertfordshire	April 1986	370,000
3. West Middlesex Hospital—Land	October 1985	500,000
4. St. Paul's Wing, Hemel Hempstead	March 1986	383,000
5. St. John's Hospital (Sold to South West Thames Regional Health Authority)	March 1986	620,000
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Grovelands Hospital, Southgate	July 1985	363,400
2. Land at Moulsham Grange	March 1986	991,300
3. Mother's Hospital, London E5	March 1986	1,000,200
4. Victoria Hospital, Romford	November 1985	1,120,000
5. Rochford Hospital—Sports Field	October 1985	608,000
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Bassetts Sports Field, Farnborough, Kent	March 1986	1,633,000
2. Land at Lennard Hospital, Bromley	June 1985	671,112
3. Fant Lane Hospital, Maidstone	January 1986	1,076,000
4. West Kent Hospital, Maidstone	March 1986	710,000
5. Newhaven Valley Hospital, Newhaven	February 1986	276,000
6. Land at West Malling, Kent	March 1986	2,055,000
7. Hawkenbury Hospital, Tunbridge Wells—Lot 1	March 1986	600,000
—Lot 2	April 1986	300,000
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
1. Dorking District Hospital	May 1985	140,940
2. Huntington, Guildford Road, Chertsey	March 1986	971,285
3. Herondean, Lavant Road, Chichester	October 1985	549,298
4. St. Benedict's Close, SW17	April 1985	928,994
5. St. Benedict's Workshop Area	May 1985	628,577
6. Old East Surrey Hospital, Redhill	March 1986	365,000
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
1. Capesthorne Children's Home, Mudeford	July 1985	351,000
2. Fordingbridge Cottage Hospital	December 1985	251,642
3. Bridge House, Basingstoke	January 1986	1,600,000
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Pollock House	not given	507,500
2. Newton Court	not given	1,907,000
3. St. Mary's Wallingford	not given	1,750,000
4. Stone House, Bishopstone Road, Stone	not given	260,000
5. Longworth Hospital	not given	320,000

Property and Address	Date of Sale	Price obtained £
South Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Holm Hospital, Tewkesbury	February 1986	240,000
2. Southgate Street, Gloucester	January 1986	1,750,000
3. Norah Fry Farmland, Somerset—Lot 1	August 1985	275,000
4. Coney Hill Hospital, Gloucester	February 1986	(1st phase) 527,974
5. Land at Tone Vale Hospital, Somerset (excluding Hill View and Tithe Farm and Buildings)	November 1985	159,000
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
1. Barnsley Hall Hospital—Land (Lot 1 transferred to DOT)	not given	80,000
2. Central Hospital, Hatton, Warwickshire—Land	November 1985	92,500
3. Stretton Sugwas Hospital, Herefordshire	June 1985	105,000
4. St. Mary's Hospital, Harborough Magna	November 1985	155,000
5. Over Whitacre Hostel, near Coleshill	January 1986	130,000
6. Blackwell Recovery Hospital (Lot 1)	January 1986	108,000
7. Prestwood Hospital Complex, near Stourbridge	April 1985	275,000
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Crofton Hospital, Liverpool	May 1985	262,000
2. The Grange Hospital, Weaverham, Cheshire	February 1986	100,000
3. West Heath Hospital, Congleton, Cheshire	July 1985	290,000
4. Robert Davies Nurses Home, Eaton Road, Liverpool	June 1985	267,000
North Western Regional Health Authority		
1. Land at Claylane, Wythenshawe	April 1986	60,000
2. Marple Dale Hospital	January 1986	395,000
3. Aspland Maternity Hospital, Hyde	April 1985	140,000
4. Land at Stretford Memorial Hospital	June 1985	70,000
5. Grove House Continuation Hospital, Barrowford	June 1985	66,500
The Hospitals for Sick Children Special Health Authority		
Land at Tadworth Court, Tadworth, Surrey	April 1985	14,283,000

Artificial Limbs

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many limbs were fitted at artificial limb and appliance centres in each month since January 1985.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: The information requested is not available centrally. However, the number of patient attendances for "fittings" in each four-week period since January 1985 is shown in the table.

Fittings at all Artificial Limb and Appliances Centres by all Contractors January 1985-December 1986

Four Week Period	Number of Patient Attendances for Fittings
1 February 1985	2,824
1 March 1985	2,857
28 March 1985	2,732
25 April 1985	2,231
24 May 1985	2,717
21 June 1985	2,674
19 July 1985	2,912
16 August 1985	2,626
13 September 1985	2,557
11 October 1985	2,758
8 November 1985	2,995
6 December 1985	2,857
3 January 1986	1,950
31 January 1986	2,716
28 February 1986	2,807
28 March 1986	2,838
25 April 1986	2,617
23 May 1986	2,547
20 June 1986	2,567
18 July 1986	2,955
15 August 1986	2,848
12 September 1986	2,655
10 October 1986	2,787
7 November 1986	2,508
5 December 1986	2,532
2 January 1987	1,805

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the progress made towards implementing each of the recommendations of the McColl report.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: We have reported progress on developing and improving the Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre services since the McColl report was published, and shall continue to do so. We are still considering some of the major issues raised in the report, and we will announce decisions as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many prosthetist appointments at artificial limb and appliance centres have been postponed due to the failure to supply limbs in time because of the Hanger's dispute.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: Since the J.E. Hanger industrial dispute began on 16 September 1986, 111 prosthetist appointments have had to be postponed as a result of the failure of the company to supply repaired or new prostheses in time.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the organisations and individuals whose reaction to the McColl report has been obtained during the consultation period; and what are the main conclusions he draws from that consultation.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 12 January 1987, at columns *109-110*.

Additionally, in commenting on the artificial limb service, patients' and professional interests have generally welcomed the report's conclusions, but the artificial limb industry has argued that it paints too bleak a picture. I gave a detailed account of the position on the artificial limb service during the debate in the House on 26 November, at columns 330-32. Most of those commenting on the wheelchair service have supported the introduction of a powered indoor-outdoor chair, but do not agree that this should be funded by abatement of mobility allowance. We are still considering this major issue in the context of decisions on other important aspects of the ALAC services raised by the McColl report.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the McColl review of artificial limb and appliance centre services was completed; when he first received the report; and why the report was not published until 27 January 1986.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1987]: The review of Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre services was completed in autumn 1985, and the working party's report was received on 14 October of that year. However, following its submission, Professor McColl and his colleagues decided to make a number of amendments which had to be incorporated before publication. Their final revisions were submitted on 8 January 1986. None affected a point of substance or any of the working party's conclusions or recommendations.

Social Workers

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what arrangements are being made for approval of social workers under the Mental Health Act 1983, following the expiry of the arrangements to give transitional approval to certain social workers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's discussions with local authority associations, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work and the National and Local Government Officers Association about the current Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work proposals for new training courses for social workers; what issues are still outstanding; and when he expects the full implementation of longer term arrangements for approved social workers under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 22 January 1987]: Discussions took place with the local authority associations the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work and the National and Local Government Officers Association last year and culminated in an agreement on arrangements for approving social workers under the Mental Health Act 1983. Local authorities were notified of the agreement in November 1986 (local authority circular (86)15).

The new arrangements will take time to implement fully and the transitional arrangements will continue until 27 October 1988. For the future, social workers who are to be considered for approval will, among other things, be required to complete a training course approved by CCETSW. Regulations and guidance on the approval of courses will be issued by CCETSW in the near future.

The only issue outstanding is the question of resources. Officials have discussed with CCETSW their likely costs for the exercise and we are now considering the position. We have also agreed with the local authority associations to consider jointly with them the extra costs that will be incurred by authorities in training social workers for these duties.

Adolescents (Hospital Care)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received a copy of the report of the British Paediatric Association working party on the needs and care of adolescents; and what plans and policies he has for the in-patient hospital care of adolescents.

Mrs. Currie [*pursuant to her reply*, 22 January 1987]: The British Paediatric Association provided a copy of this report to the Department and to regional medical officers. We have no plans at this stage to issue further advice to health authorities.

DEFENCE

"Secret Society"

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence by what means he first obtained knowledge of the content of Duncan Campbell's film for BBC Scotland, the "Secret Society".

Mr. Younger: I will answer shortly.

Military Convoys

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take to prevent those protesting at military convoys from causing injury to others lawfully assisting such convoys.

Mr. Stanley: The policing of military convoys is a matter for the civil police. The safety of all those present is always a major consideration.

Resource Allocations

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any recent change in his Department's appraisal of the military threat to the United Kingdom has led to a reallocation of resources within the defence budget.

Mr. Stanley: Not to any material extent.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to strengthen the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Stanley: On present plans we intend to increase the size of BAOR to 56,000 by the end of the decade. Together with plans to transfer manpower from the support area to the front line, this will permit the formation of a twelfth

in-theatre armoured regiment and a third air defence regiment equipped with the Starstreak missile; the remechanisation of 6 Airmobile Brigade; the introduction of the Phoenix remotely piloted vehicle; and an increase in armoured engineer support to battlegroups.

In addition to the introduction of Starstreak and Phoenix we also plan to strengthen BAOR through the provision of additional Challenger tanks, the Warrior mechanised infantry combat vehicle, the multiple launch rocket system, and the Rapier 2000 air defence missile.

Royal Ordnance Factories

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation he proposes to hold in connection with obligations under the Trade Unions of Public Employees 81 agreement with the relevant trade unions prior to finalising any sale of the Royal Ordnance factories.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The transfer of ownership by sale of the Government's 100 per cent. shareholding in Royal Ordnance plc would not involve any change in the legal identity of the owner of the business and employer of the work force and so would not affect the terms and conditions of service of employees. In these circumstances, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) 1981 regulations do not apply. However, my right hon. Friend recognises the importance of keeping the work force informed of developments and is ready to meet the relevant trade unions and hear their views before finalising any sale.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have taken place between his Department and the work force of the Royal Ordnance factories concerning plans for their privatisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The change of status and privatisation of the Royal Ordnance factories were discussed extensively with the work force at the time of the passage of the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984. Since then, there has been correspondence and a number of meetings with representatives of the work force. Royal Ordnance plc has also taken care to keep the work force informed on progress towards privatisation. On the current position I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave today to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of the progress of the Government's plans for the privatisation of the Royal Ordnance factories.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In accordance with plans announced to the House of Commons by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 24 July 1986, the Ministry of Defence is negotiating with four companies to sell the Government's 100 per cent. shareholding in Royal Ordnance plc. The four companies are currently conducting detailed reviews of Royal Ordnance, including visits to various factories. Final selection of the company with which a sale contract will be signed will not be for some time yet.

DROPS

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what authority General Stopford was asked to ascertain directly from Mr. Trafford Broughton his attitude to the BBC Panorama programme on the DROPS contract;

(2) on what dates General Stopford sought to ascertain directly from Mr. Trafford Broughton his attitude to the DROPS contract;

(3) what was the source of his information that Mr. Trafford Broughton's conversation with General Stopford accorded exactly with the line volunteered on a separate occasion at the British Army equipment exhibition to the Chief of Defence Procurement and Brigadier Last;

(4) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a report of the conversation between Mr. Trafford Broughton, the Chief of Defence Procurement and Brigadier Last at the British Army equipment exhibition;

(5) on what authority Brigadier Last and the Chief of Defence Procurement sought at the British Army equipment exhibition to ascertain Mr. Trafford Broughton's attitude to the Panorama programme on the DROPS contract.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will answer shortly.

United Kingdom Mobile Force

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he has anything to add to the statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, to the House on 13 January, *Official Report*, column 232, on the nature of the United Kingdom mobile force;

(2) if he will make a further statement on the future of the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein;

(3) whether discussions have taken place recently with politicians, officials, or military personnel from Denmark on any proposed changes to the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to that country;

(4) whether discussions have taken place with General Bernard Rogers, Supreme Commander, Allied Forces, Europe, on the future of the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein;

(5) whether discussions have taken place recently with any North Atlantic Treaty Organisation personnel on changes to the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein;

(6) whether discussions have taken place recently with politicians, officials, or military personnel from the Federal Republic of Germany on any changes to the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein;

(7) whether discussions have taken place recently with politicians, officials or military personnel from the United States of America on any proposed changes to the United Kingdom mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) on 20 January. Naturally all interested Allies are being kept informed of our discussions within NATO and, in view of the strategic importance of the Baltic approaches, any proposals for change would be a matter for collective Alliance consideration.

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of cost savings by withdrawing the United Kingdom's mobile force commitment to Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's Government are committed to making efforts to improve output from the considerable resources we devote to defence and it is in this context that we are discussing within NATO whether, in its present role, the UKMF represents the most effective use of those resources. The financial implications of any change in current deployment plans would depend on the outcome of the confidential discussions currently underway in NATO, which cannot yet be predicted.

Military Data Network

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the contract for the new proposed military data network; which firms have submitted bids; and which firms have been shortlisted.

Mr. Archie Hamilton [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1987, c. *307*]: The project to which the hon. Member is, I believe, referring is in the planning stage. No tenders have yet been sought, no firms have been short-listed, and no contract has been placed other than for consultancy assistance in project definition and planning. Since tenders will be invited shortly, it would be inappropriate to publish estimates of the value of the contract.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 108**

SESSION 1986-87

12th January—23rd January 1987

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This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speakers rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
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SESSION 1986-87

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THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 108**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1986-87

House of Commons

Monday 12 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATHS OF MEMBERS

Mr. Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the deaths of David Charles Penhaligon Esquire, Member for Truro, and Nicolas Guy Barnett Esquire, Member for Greenwich, and I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the hon. Members.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Bus Services

1. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will visit Merseyside to consider at first hand the results of bus deregulation in the area.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Wareing: May I assure the hon. Gentleman that I should be only too ready to take him on a walk round bus stops in Liverpool and Merseyside? It would have to be a walk, because of the irregularity of the buses. It is not on for the Minister simply to say "No", when he must realise the scandal and chaos that have resulted from the disastrous deregulation of the buses on Merseyside. Does he realise that a Merseyside passenger transport executive report stated last week that no fewer than 20 per cent. of passengers have turned to other forms of transport? Does he realise that the report says that what was a good and reasonable service is now completely inefficient and incompetent?

Mr. Mitchell: That is entirely a matter for those on the ground. The extent of the reliability of the operations of a local bus service is nothing to do with the Government or with legislation. It demonstrates the management efficiency of the local operators. In this case, they have not been helped by strikes.

Mr. Fry: Does my hon. Friend recall that only a few years ago between 80 and 90 per cent. of passengers on off-peak Merseyside public transport services paid no fares? That resulted in large sums of public money having to be spent to sustain Merseyside public transport, and that was one of the major reasons for the Government's reorganisation.

Mr. Mitchell: Total ratepayer subsidy on Merseyside last year amounted to nearly £50 per man, woman and child in the area.

Mr. Alton: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that before the Government's legislation the people on Merseyside were very happy with the bus services and that since the legislation bus fares have gone up, services have been slashed and there has been a strike every Saturday, which has inconvenienced the local people of Merseyside? Trench warfare has developed between the company and the users, and the initials MPTA are now thought to stand for, "Make Passenger Transport Awful".

Mr. Mitchell: Those who were using the bus services at subsidised fares may have been happy, but the ratepayers who were having to foot the bill were certainly not happy.

Mr. Sackville: When my hon. Friend visits Merseyside, will he also consider the position in neighbouring Greater Manchester where the passenger transport executive decided to withhold £10 million of the £17 million available and failed to provide an adequate timetable—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about Merseyside.

Mr. Sackville: Will my hon. Friend the Minister draw a comparison with the situation on Merseyside?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to compare the way in which Manchester has sought to implement the Act and the position elsewhere in the country. Manchester provided only a skeleton or essential network instead of providing the socially necessary services found elsewhere in Britain.

Mr. Stott: Is the Minister aware that the ratepayers of Merseyside are also electors and that they voted consistently for a proper public transport system? The Minister cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and refuse to accept responsibility for what is happening on Merseyside and elsewhere. Since the Government introduced the Transport Act 1985, transport in Britain has been ruined. Responsibility lies with the Secretary of State and the Minister and not with the MPTA, which is having to put up with the results of that legislation. The Minister bears responsibility, and he was warned what would happen during the passage of the Bill two years ago.

Mr. Mitchell: Whether bus services are reliable and comply with timetables is a matter for local management, not for the Government.

London Underground

2. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps beyond those announced on 28 November he is taking to respond to and implement the recommendations in the report "Crime on the London Underground".

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Moore): Our priority is to ensure that the extra £15 million is used to greatest effect. To this end we are in close touch with London Underground and the British Transport police on monitoring the pilot schemes and ensuring that the other recommendations are followed up.

Mr. Cartwright: Although the Secretary of State's reply is welcome, will he confirm that that £15 million is sufficient only to fund pilot schemes in a number of very important crime prevention areas? In view of the seriousness of the problem, will he give an assurance that resources will be available to make crime prevention measures more widely available if the pilot schemes turn out to be successful?

Mr. Moore: The £15 million goes beyond the pilot schemes. The hon. Gentleman and, I believe, all hon. Members rightly support what is being done, and I think that they will first want to see the pilot schemes in operation. The £15 million is spread over three years. I shall not go into the other things on which the money will be spent, but it will be spent on more than pilot schemes. The key issue is not resources, but putting them effectively to work.

Mr. McCrindle: Although I welcome the prospect of there being improved equipment to enable the British Transport police to carry out their task on the London Underground system, is my right hon. Friend satisfied that their establishment is adequate for that? Although equipment is desirable, effectiveness may well depend, at the end of the day, on the number of men available to prevent crime on the London Underground system.

Mr. Moore: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. However, it is not a matter, in this case, of the number of officers involved. Indeed, the number of British Transport police has increased. We are talking about an improvement in specific facilities. That is what the report sought, and that is what the Government are committed to.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not also a crime of sorts for the management of London Regional Transport and of the Underground to disregard and tear up negotiated agreements with the unions? That has led to the strike that is threatened on Wednesday. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do anything about the fact that in a 75 per cent. turnout, 82 per cent. voted for a strike on Wednesday——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about crime.

Mr. Banks: Absolutely.

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman's attempt to change the question was the absolute in crime. London Regional Transport staff were asked whether they would oppose the current threat to pay, conditions and employment opportunities by taking industrial action, including strike action if necessary, and were assured by the general-secretary that that would mean that they would not be going to the barricades on 6 January. There is no dispute with London Regional Transport, and in the absence of a dispute, it would be a crime against the travelling public if there were a strike.

London Regional Transport

3. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport, he will raise with him the improvement of bus and Underground services.

Mr. David Mitchell: Yes, I would expect bus and rail service standards to be among the subjects discussed.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Apart from the threatened strike, which we hope will be averted, will my hon. Friend ask the chairman to take my constituents into his confidence and give them some hope that there will be an end to difficulties on the Central line arising from timetabling, the failure of equipment and work on the track?

Mr. Mitchell: I join my hon. Friend in regretting deeply the proposed strike, which would be an especially callous act. Speed restrictions for essential maintenance have been largely responsible for the level of service on the Central line for my hon. Friend's constituents, and London Regional Transport apologises for delays. It has plans for new signalling and new rolling stock.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister explain why the world-famous driving school at Chiswick has been closed? Will he comment on the allegation that it is possible for private contractors to hire men with public service vehicle licences who have not been eligible for employment on London Transport buses for health reasons?

Mr. Mitchell: The closure of the Chiswick driving school is outside the scope of the question, but I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Chapman: Will my hon. Friend confirm that in recent months there has been an unprecedented rise in the number of passengers using the Underground service and that this is being reflected by the LRT management in the provision of additional services? Is he aware that some problems arise from the new timetables which were introduced at the beginning of November in the light of staffing problems, but will he recognise that the more people who use the Underground the more the Government should look favourably on providing increased capital expenditure for this vital part of our public transport network?

Mr. Mitchell: I agree with my hon. Friend. Last year there were 1,900 million passenger journeys on the LRT network, including an all-time record level of Underground patronage. LRT's investment level is at an all-time record this year and is planned to be even greater next year.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Now that the London Docklands Development Corporation has shown an interest in linking the east London line and the Bakerloo and Northern lines at the Elephant and Castle so that there is an east-west link south of the river as well as the proposed docklands light railway north of the river, will the Minister ask his Department to take a positive interest in the improvement of services south of the river, east-west, so that a natural circuit can be completed and we do not have the present difficulty of travelling in a congested part of south London which is a white hole in the underground network?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the chairman's attention.

Mr. Sims: When my hon. Friend sees the chairman of London Transport, will he tell him that I still receive complaints about the quality of London Transport bus services, but that in recent months I have had the unusual experience of receiving compliments about contracted-out services, especially the 61 service in my constituency, which is run by Metrobus Ltd.? Is there not a moral to be drawn from this, and will he bring it to the chairman's notice?

Mr. Mitchell: London Transport has started a programme of putting out to competitive tender a series of routes. Some of the routes have been won by London Buses Ltd. and some by outside companies. Standards appear to be satisfactory, and in a number of instances better than they were before.

Mr. Snape: Has the Minister ever travelled on the Underground in London? If he has from time to time, can he account for the fact that throughout the system there are unmanned booking offices, ticket machines that are either out of order or switched off altogether, and unmanned stations, especially after 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the evening, yet London Regional Transport's management can still hand back about £20 million to the Government, presumably because it is not needed? Will he reflect on the fact that at £20 million the knighthood for the chairman of London Regional Transport must be one of the most expensive baubles known since Lloyd George was alive?

Mr. Mitchell: First, I travel on the London Underground from time to time. Secondly, I consider that the hon. Gentleman has made a cheap and nasty jibe at a gentleman who has provided distinguished public service and who is not here to answer back.

Motorways

4. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received representations about the speed of traffic upon motorways.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): The Department receives representations on a wide range of road safety issues, including speeds on motorways. Ninety eight per cent. of accidents are on other roads.

Mr. Baker: Is my hon. Friend aware that the 70 mph speed limit on motorways is not being enforced? Will he have a word with the Home Secretary, if there are substantial safety or oil conservation grounds, and ask him to enforce the present speed limit? If, as I believe is the case, there are no such grounds, will my hon. Friend bear in mind that we have the lowest motorway speed limit of any major country in western Europe? Will he seek to raise the limit to a realistic level?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that there are over 30,000 prosecutions a year for motorway offences. I shall do as he suggests and have a word with colleagues in the Home Office. I am sure that the suggestion that the motorway speed limit should be raised will not find favour.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Will the Under-Secretary of State take a representation from me about the lack of regard for the 50 mph speed limit at contraflows? That is where accidents take place. It is my view that the indicators for a 50 mph speed limit are not clear enough, given the situation at contraflows, and that is dangerous.

Mr. Bottomley: I shall review the signs. It is important that, unless advised otherwise, people stick to motorways, even where there are contraflows. Even with contraflows, with their increased dangers, motorways are still safer than other roads. It might be a seasonal time to remind everyone that the speed limit is the limit. It is not supposed to be an average. In bad weather conditions—whether fog or ice—people should reduce their speeds.

Mr. Higgins: My hon. Friend does not intend to raise the 70 mph limit on motorways. This will encourage even more the maniacs who occupy outside lanes. Will he please erect 70 mph signs on motorways? At the moment there is no indication or reminder of what the limit is, in contrast, for example, with France, where the limit is constantly repeated.

Mr. Bottomley: I am considering the suggestion of erecting 70 mph signs. Everyone who has passed the driving test at any stage since the war should know that the old unrestricted speed limit went a long time ago. I shall do what I can to remind people of the need to keep to the speed limit. Raising the speed limit from 70 mph would not be applauded universally. I do not propose such action.

Mr. Haynes: When will the Minister wake up to the fact that his Government have introduced more transport

legislation than any other Government? The result is that the motorway system is cluttered with all sorts of vehicles, including buses. The important point is that there is far too much traffic bunching. Why does the Minister not seriously consider raising the motorway speed limit so that we avoid some of the accidents?

Mr. Bottomley: I suggest to hon. Members that the way to deal with accidents is to slow down rather than to speed up. Bunching can take place at any speed, and the slower the speed of the bunch, the better.

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend contemplate the simple proposition that, with more than 5,000 people killed and 250,000 people maimed on the roads every year, safety standards on our motorways and other roads are virtually non-existent when compared with the stringent safety requirements laid down for British Rail? When will the Government make road transport subject to the same safety rules and requirements as are laid down for rail transport?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will know, or will be interested to hear if he does not know, that motorways carry 13 per cent. of national vehicle mileage but have only 2 per cent of accidents. Although motorway safety is an important subject, it is even more important in urban areas —built-up areas—where there is over 40 per cent. of the traffic and 80 per cent. of the accidents. A real reduction in the number of people who die on our roads—5,000—will be achieved by attention to built-up area traffic and other matters such as drink driving.

Written-off Vehicles

5. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has taken any action to end the practice whereby vehicles which have been written off are allowed to re-appear on the market.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): We are reviewing the problems associated with written-off vehicles with the police, insurers and other interested bodies to see whether there are ways in which the present situation can be improved.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister accept that there is an accumulating body of evidence that ripping off customers by unscrupulous car dealers is becoming far too widespread and, in some cases, dangerous to the customers? Will he therefore consider making certain that no vehicle registration document is issued from Swansea for any vehicle that has been written off, or, if he cannot go that far, will he at least make sure that it is printed on every document that the car has been written off, so that the customer might have some redress through fair trading legislation?

Mr. Spicer: We are aware that there is considerable public concern about this matter. The working party should report within the next two or three months. It has been set up with a view to seeing whether we can get more rigid guidelines for what constitutes a write off and what can be done to make severe accident history more readily available to the public, and, as the hon. Gentleman asks, we seek to ensure that potentially hazardous vehicles are kept off the road.

Mr. Heddle: Does my hon. Friend accept that probably the poorer members of the community are forced to buy those potential death traps because they are the cheaper cars on the forecourt of the second-hand car lot? Perhaps those people would not go to the Automobile Association for an independent structural survey beforehand. At the moment, the power of monitoring is vested in the county trading officers, who can see the cars only after they have been bought. Will my hon. Friend consider giving the police power, where there is a suspicion that such death traps are on second-hand car lot forecourts, to enter those forecourts to examine the cars before they are sold?

Mr. Spicer: The police already have powers to investigate accidents when write offs occur, so police powers already exist. The question is whether one should have more rigid guidelines on what constitutes a write off. That is the real problem.

Docklands Light Railway

6. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the London Docklands Development Corporation concerning the funding of the Beckton extension of the docklands light railway.

Mr. David Mitchell: We expect to receive LDDC's formal proposals for financing the Beckton extension of the docklands light railway later this month. In the meantime my officials, together with those of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, have been discussing with LDDC the form that those proposals might take.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Minister aware that everybody in the area wants that railway, and wants it to be provided by public funds? There is also a desire for it to be routed via Canning Town. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is open to him to let the Second Reading of the Bill go forward, and if he receives the financial guarantees from the LDDC that he seeks, then and only then should he approve its construction? Is that not the best way to proceed?

Mr. Mitchell: I am in some doubt whether everyone takes the view that the railway should be provided by public funds. The LDDC believes, and its research suggests, that large increases in land values in the docklands when the railway is built can be harnessed to pay for it. I plan to visit the area to see for myself on Wednesday this week, and I hope to see the hon. Gentleman on that occasion.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my hon. Friend aware that this is a very important and desirable development, which will bring great advantages to the people of that part of London? Will he give all the assistance that the Government are able to give to that project?

Mr. Mitchell: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in and connections with the area. I hope that I shall also have the opportunity to see him on my visit on Wednesday, and I shall keep in mind the point that he made.

Mr. Tony Banks: As the railway will be funded by private developers — indeed, it is just a developers' railway—may I point out that there are other transport needs in Newham that must be met? That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and myself argue that the railway should be provided out of public funds so that it can meet public need in the area.

Mr. Mitchell: If the same objective can be achieved without use of the public purse, it seems to be wholly desirable that it should so be.

M25 (Service Areas)

7. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what sites are being considered for the construction of service areas on the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A service area is already in partial operation at South Mimms, and Esso has been chosen to develop another at Thurrock. Our proposal for a site at Clacket lane near Westerham has recently been the subject of a public inquiry, together with other proposals by private developers. We are still considering proposals for Iver.

Mr. Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is proposed that the service area at Iver should be built on green belt land between two built-up areas in my constituency—Richings park and Iver village? Because that would be so close to hundreds of houses, there is considerable local opposition. Will my hon. Friend consider looking at a more suitable site?

Mr. Bottomley: The consultants tried to identify other more suitable sites, but I am not sure whether one was found. I shall bear my hon. Friend's considerations in mind. We understand that considerable landscaping would be undertaken to shield housing from environmental intrusions.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is there any restriction on military vehicles using service areas, especially as nuclear warheads are frequently transported on our motorways, and bearing in mind the serious accident that took place at the weekend? Is the Minister not concerned about the use of public roads for that purpose?

Mr. Bottomley: I am not sure that military convoys often use motorway service areas.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Will my hon. Friend confirm that no service area is to be placed in Loughton or elsewhere in the Epping Forest constituency?

Mr. Bottomley: I was asked where we proposed to have motorway service areas on the M25, and my hon. Friend's area of concern is not one that I mentioned.

Mr. Madden *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: The question is about the M25.

Mr. Madden: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. What provision is being made for facilities for those driving heavy goods vehicles on the M25, and what is the general policy on the provision of such facilities on the motorway network?

Mr. Bottomley: One of the reasons why we maintain strict control over motorway service areas is to ensure the availability of some services which may not otherwise be provided. We take the provision of rest facilities for heavy goods vehicle drivers seriously and ensure that they are provided in motorway service areas.

Settle to Carlisle Line

8. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his decision concerning the application by British Rail for the closure of the Settle to Carlisle line.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have only recently received the joint report of the transport users consultative committees for north-eastern and north-western England and British Rail's financial case. I cannot say how long it will take to consider these reports carefully, together with other relevant factors.

Mr. Waller: I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in the future of this line and has visited it. As the TUCCs came out unanimously in favour of the retention of the line and thousands of people wrote in support of that approach, does my hon. Friend agree that it could be seen as perverse to take a decision which did not involve the retention of the line? At the same time, does he agree that it would be unreasonable to make such a decision without allowing for the provision of funds which are particularly necessary for repairs, and that such funds could come from the Government's tourism budget?

Mr. Mitchell: As I have only just received the report I cannot possibly pre-empt a decision at this stage. I take note of my hon. Friend's point about the availability of funds from alternative sources, including tourism.

Mr. Wallace: If the Minister has had a chance to read some of the report, does he accept that it shows that British Rail has not made a detailed case for closure? Apart from the hardship caused to local people by closure, there appears to be considerable potential for further marketing and promotion of this line to make it even more profitable than it has been until now. Should not the Government take that approach, rather than entertain any possibility of closure?

Mr. Mitchell: It may be helpful to say that it is not part of the TUCCs' role to consider British Rail's case for closure. Its job is to consider what hardship would be caused if the line were closed and to report to Ministers on that. That is why British Rail's case was not deployed before them. We now have British Rail's financial case and we are considering it together with the report of the TUCCs.

Mr. Watson: I appreciate that my hon. Friend cannot pre-empt his decision, but is he aware of strong rumours circulating locally and in British Rail that this line will be kept open? In those circumstances, will he confirm that any decision on his part to close the line would be greeted with some surprise and dismay?

Mr. Mitchell: I can report to my hon. Friend that there are rumours in British Rail and among the public that the line is to be kept open and that there are also rumours that it is to be closed.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Minister aware that a great deal of pleasure has been expressed at the TUCCs' recommendation that the Settle-Carlisle line should remain open?

Although one understands the pure technicalities of that decision, will the Minister take clearly into account the potential economic benefits to British Rail of keeping it open? In making his decision about finance, which I hope he will announce at the same time, will he avail himself of that escape hatch offered to him by his hon. Friend and try to raise the money from somewhere else and simply square up to the fact that the Government must provide the money for British Rail to do the essential repairs to keep the line open?

Mr. Mitchell: Of course we will consider carefully the points which the hon. Gentleman has properly made. I accept entirely that the economic factors, and particularly the effect on Appleby as the largest town to be isolated if the railway line is closed, must be taken into account and that they are separate from the questions of hardship which the TUCCs considered.

Road Safety

9. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further action after the Christmas drink drive campaign he proposes on road safety publicity.

Mr. John Moore: Our clear-cut "Don't Drink and Drive" campaign won strong public support. I shall follow it up in the spring and autumn. This will reinforce the message that drinking and driving is a year-round problem and must be tackled as seriously as we can.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Further to my right hon. Friend's reply, is he aware that in Scotland a campaign group is being formed of some of the relatives of bereaved families whose relatives have been killed through reckless driving? Is he further aware that a point which they make is that if the periods of disqualification for driving were much longer that would constitute an effective deterrent?

Mr. Moore: I was not aware of the particular Scottish illustration to which my hon. Friend has drawn my attention, and I shall certainly draw it to the attention of my colleagues in the Home Office.

The Government will do all in their power to ensure effectively that we control the appalling problem in this country of drinking and driving. I shall certainly consider the point which my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Boyes: Does the Minister recognise the strength of the powerful campaign that was run over Christmas time? Many hon. Members welcome the Secretary of State's undertaking to carry the campaign on throughout the year. Will the Secretary of State give three further undertakings? First, will he make the message even stronger? Secondly, will he consider stronger sentences for people convicted of drink driving offences? Thirdly, as an indication of his good will, will he reduce further the acceptable blood alcohol limit of people caught drinking and driving?

Mr. Moore: In relation to the particular points that have been raised, I have listened very carefully to the public reaction. I was especially delighted with the media reaction to the message and I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about making it even stronger and clearer. I shall certainly consider that sympathetically. I am not sure that sentencing policy—although that is not my departmental job—is the key in this area, as opposed to trying to change attitudes, which is what we are seeking to do through our campaigns, which are supported by the private and the public sectors. I shall consider anything that will help in this area.

M40 (Waterstock-Wendlebury)

10. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the public inquiry on the Waterstock to Wendlebury section of the M40 to begin; how long he expects it to last; and when he expects to be able to publish his decision.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Draft orders for this section of the M40 will be published shortly. A public inquiry could take place six to nine months later.

I cannot say how long it will last or when the decision will come.

Mr. Baldry: Will my hon. Friend simply confirm two points: first, that, irrespective of the length of the public inquiry, it is the Government's firm intention that the whole of the M40 extension from Oxford to Birmingham should be opened as one complete entity, and, secondly, that it is the Government's firm intention that the whole of the motorway extension should be opened by 1990?

Mr. Bottomley: Subject to the outcome of statutory procedures, the aim is to start construction on the Waterstock to Wendlebury section in time to open the whole of the M40 extension from Waterstock to Warwick at about the same time, which is about the end of 1990.

European Community (Air Transport)

11. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress was made during the United Kingdom presidency to secure the liberalisation of air transport within the European Community.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Solid progress has been made on the contents of a three-year first step towards full liberalisation by the agreed target date of 1992.

There is now unanimous support for our proposals on capacity and a substantial majority in favour of our ideas on market access. Seven states support our proposals for cheaper fares.

Mr. Galley: My hon. Friend is to be heartily congratulated on the progress made during the past few months on the liberalisation of air transport. In view, however, of the dilatory, often hostile, attitude of many of our EEC partners, what concrete steps can he take during the next few months, during the Belgian presidency and thereafter, to quicken the pace of reforms? Furthermore, is he satisfied that British airlines, especially British Airways, will be well placed to take full advantage of a more competitive regime?

Mr. Spicer: I thank my hon. Friend for his earlier remarks. Our proposals provide for a great deal more competition between airlines in Europe and will undoubtedly reduce air fares there. As to my hon. Friend's main question, we shall fully support the Belgian presidency in it efforts to finalise the package. We also intend to enter into further bilateral discussions with certain Governments, and in particular I am arranging to have discussions with the French Minister in early February.

Dornoch Firth

12. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the Mackay Consultants report "The Social and Economic Case for the Dornoch Firth Rail Bridge", he will meet a deputation of local interests further to consider the financing of a rail crossing of the Dornoch Firth.

Mr. David Mitchell: No, Sir. British Rail has not to date submitted an investment proposal, either based on the Mackay report or not.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister clarify the position, because the Mackay report says that British Rail could put forward a proposal based only on financial considerations and that a cost-benefit analysis is needed? Will that cost-benefit analysis have to be done by British Rail, or will the Government do it themselves? Will they do it as a matter of urgency, as the cost of constructing a rail bridge in association with a road bridge is much less than if one has to be built subsequently?

Mr. Mitchell: The Mackay Consultants' report is being considered by the Government, but nothing has yet persuaded us that we should interfere with British Rail's judgment. The expenditure for British Rail would amount to some £12·7 million and the amount of revenue that would be at risk if the Dornoch bridge were not proceeded with for rail connection would be only £120,000 per year. The hon. Gentleman will see that there is a dramatic difference between the outlay and the potential financial saving. The point made by the consultants on the cost benefit is being considered by the Government.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

State Security

51. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Attorney-General how many prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act there have been since 1979.

52. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement concerning recent consultations he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions concerning prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act.

54. **Mr. Janner** asked the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions concerning cases currently under consideration involving alleged offences under the Official Secrets Act.

The Attorney-General (Sir Michael Havers): Since 1979 there have been 16 prosecutions under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, including two which were not proceeded with. During the same period there have been seven prosecutions under section 1, including one which was not proceeded with, and three under section 7 of the 1920 Act. Five cases under section 2 are presently pending before the courts.

The consent of the Attorney-General is required before any prosecution under the Official Secrets Acts may proceed, and this may be granted either on the basis of a written request by the Director of Public Prosecutions, or after a discussion. Recently I met the Director of Public Prosecutions and we discussed the various cases which are under consideration arising out of the Wright case and its wider aspects.

Mr. Dubs: Does it not seem that in recent years the motive in deciding whether there should be prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act was more to avoid political embarrassment than for any other reason? While I appreciate that, until the Wright case is over, the Attorney-General cannot make a full statement, would it not be right, when the case is completed, for him to make a full and frank statement to the House as to the basis on which future prosecutions under the Act will be carried out?

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Gentleman to a list published in answer to a question by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), on 15 December last year, which discloses the type of offence. There are too many cases of people who have for money given information that is subject to the Official Secrets Act, such as police officers who have given details of previous criminal offences and things of that kind. I intend to make a full statement the moment that I am able to do so.

Mr. Spearing: Is it not frequently the case that Governments, faced with the publication of unpalatable facts, engineer or promote the leakage of those facts from Select Committee or minority reports of Select Committees, or by other means? Bearing in mind the dual responsibilities of Law Officers of the Crown, political on the one hand and legal on the other, is it not a principle that their legal actions, particularly in matters relating to prosecutions, or lack of action relating to prosecutions, should be, and should be seen to be, wholly on the legal side of their functions?

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree with that. I assure the House that there is no question of a political basis for any decision that I or my right hon. and learned Friend have taken in any case under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Janner: Has the Attorney-General considered himself, or discussed with the Director of Public Prosecutions, the workings of this archaic and terrible old Act? For example, has he considered whether or not it would be a breach of the Act for information to be given to the public concerning the horrific dangers arising from the crashes of military convoys, such as that which occurred this weekend, about which public-spirited citizens saw fit to tell the public? Had they not done so, the public would not have known about the crash.

The Attorney-General: The basis upon which I operate was given in an oral answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) as far back as 9 April 1984. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that in appropriate circumstances Ministers themselves can authorise disclosure.

Mr. Aitken: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Attorney-General of the day is frequently put in a virtually impossible position by the Act? On the one hand the Law Officers have a clear duty to enforce the law, while on the other, the law is so widely drafted that it is virtually unenforceable without bizarre selectivity in the exercise of the prosecutor's discretion. When my right hon. and learned Friend makes his statement, will he therefore place himself firmly on the side of the reformers of the Official Secrets Act?

The Attorney-General: Inevitably the decisions that I, the Director of Public Prosecutions and my right hon. and learned Friend have to take are sometimes described as political decisions. However, I assure the House that we look at each case entirely wearing our quasi-judicial hats. We are not influenced in any way by the political consequences. Sometimes, as my hon. Friend the Member

for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) said, one is put in an impossible position. However, we use our discretion and our best judgment.

Mr. Stanbrook: Despite the comparatively wide terms in which the Official Secrets Act is drafted, do not the figures revealed by my right hon. and learned Friend's original reply show that because the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions is required there is a proper balance between the public interest and the enforcement of the law in every case and that, given the discretion that can be exercised by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and in the absence of any serious suggestions for reform of the Act, the present system is working much better than one might have expected?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend must appreciate that it is primarily my decision, but always I am advised by the DPP, and in many cases I am also advised by counsel.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: And by the Prime Minister.

The Attorney-General: Certainly not. There is no question——

Mr. Skinner: The Prime Minister's dish cloth.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Attorney-General: Now that I have a moment to reply, there is no question, ever, in any single case under the Official Secrets Act or, indeed, in any case involving a criminal prosecution, of my having been ordered or directed in any way by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have no sympathy at all with those who reveal real state secrets, but the ludicrous Australian trial and the Official Secrets Act combined have not even preserved the Government's dignity in the Wright case. Will the Attorney-General confirm that if Wright were to decide to publish in Ireland, following the Miller case, the chances of successfully preventing publication would be very slight? In the light of that, is the House not entitled to a Government statement on the future of the Official Secrets Act? Once Mr. Justice Powell has announced his decision, will the Attorney-General make a full statement to the House about the Government's handling of the Wright case?

The Attorney-General: On the Australian case, I should have thought that it would be absolutely apparent to the hon. Gentleman that it involves a very important principle, namely, that those who promise to keep quiet for the rest of their lives should keep that promise. It is very interesting that I cannot find a single hon. Member, on either side of the House, who has received a letter complaining about that.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Can the Attorney-General tell the House if any useful purpose is served by prosecuting people who reveal matters of ancient history which can do no possible damage to the state and who, by reason of the threat of prosecution, feel driven to leave the United Kingdom?

The Attorney-General: Let us get the procedure clear. I am surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman does not appreciate the position. The case in Australia is not a prosecution — it is civil proceedings for an injunction. Whether the person concerned left to go to Tasmania because of the book or for other reasons, I simply do not know. The principle remains, and it is one that we are determined to uphold.

53. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Attorney-General what is the cost to date to public funds of the case being brought against publication of Mr. Wright's book in Australia; and if he will make a statement.

56. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Attorney-General what has been the cost to public funds of the action taken against Mr. Peter Wright in the Australian courts; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The total cost to public funds to date of the court action in Australia concerning the publication of a book by Mr. Peter Wright, including legal fees paid to date, and fares and subsistence for civil servants, is estimated to be of the order of £170,000.

Mr. Greenway: Even if counsel's fees considerably increased that figure, is [illegible] money spent in this way on proceedings against Mr. Wright necessary in order to deter ill-motivated ex-MI5 employees from damaging the security of the nation? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that in future every ex-MI5 employee who breaks the Official Secrets Act should have all pension and emoluments ended forthwith?

The Attorney-General: I agree entirely with the first part of my hon. Friend's question, but the latter part of his question is not a matter for me.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: As there is now quite a lot of public money involved, will the Attorney-General tell us whether the action was taken because Mr. Wright broke the rules of confidentiality, or because the material in his proposed publication was considered damaging to national security?

The Attorney-General: The principal purpose of those proceedings is to preserve the principle that those who have promised to keep the secrets do so.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Policy

62. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the current overseas aid programme and budget is channelled through multilateral agencies and bilateral Government agreements, respectively.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Chris Patten): In 1985-86, the latest year for which figures are available, Britain's contributions to multilateral aid agencies accounted for 42 per cent. of gross aid programme expenditure, and total bilateral aid for 58 per cent. Bilateral country programmes amounted to 40 per cent. of total expenditure.

Mr. Chapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. Can he say whether there has been any change in those proportions in recent years, and will he confirm that, generally speaking, long-term sustained aid projects can be more effectively attained through bilateral Government agreements and that a major role for multilateral agencies should be to assist in providing short-term emergency aid when necessary?

Mr. Patten: By and large I agree with my hon. Friend. There has not been much change in the balance in the past

few years, except that our membership of the Community has had some effect because of the size of the European Community programme. Multilateral agencies have an important role to play. For example, UNICEF, which I am hoping to visit next week, has an important role. That point was put to me by the late hon. Member for Greenwich, Guy Barnett, shortly before his death. He felt strongly about these issues and the House will miss his contributions in debates about aid and development, about which he felt so passionately and about which he knew so much.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister confirm that the relative increase in the proportion paid by way of multilateral aid has nothing to do with Government policy, but has more to do with the drop in total aid given by the Government? Does he not think that recipient countries can get far more value from multilateral aid than from bilateral aid, which has conditions attached?

Mr. Patten: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's second proposition. In relation to his first proposition I am pleased to say that in the last three or four years our aid programme has been increasing and, based on the public expenditure figures, over the next three years it should be secured in real terms.

Mr. Bowen Wells: While congratulating my hon. Friend on maintaining the increase in the overseas development budget, may I ask him whether he agrees that he can accommodate the increased aid and trade provision and the increased demands of multilateral agencies only by increasing the total aid budget so that there is more in the bilateral budget, thus supporting the efforts of the Department of Trade and Industry in promoting British exports and interests overseas?

Mr. Patten: I hope that I can satisfy my hon. Friend yet again in the next few weeks by announcing some small increases in our contributions to the multilateral agencies and increases in some of our most important bilateral programmes.

Chile

63. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the votes cast by the representative of Her Majesty's Government concerning recent loans to Chile by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Mr. Chris Patten: After weighing the views of the members of his constituency and obtaining satisfactory answers to technical questions that we had raised, our executive director supported the loans for a hydro-electric project and a global neighbourhood improvement and sites-and-services programme.

Dame Judith Hart: First, may I express my appreciation for what the Minister said about the sad death of our friend Guy Barnett, the late hon. Member for Greenwich?

Given that Britain was the only country to vote in favour of the recent World Bank loan to Chile—even the United States abstained — and since we provide military training for Chileans and supply ships to Chile, would it not be better if the Government confessed that, apart from paying lip-service to the EEC condemnation of Pinochet in Chile, they completely support him?

Mr. Patten: Uncharacteristically, the right hon. Lady is wrong on this issue. She is wrong to say that Britain was the only country, of the larger donors, to support the World Bank loan. As she knows, although I think she disagrees with what I shall say on this, we always judge issues in the international financial institutions entirely on technical grounds, as we are bound to do by the IADB and World Bank articles of agreement.

Mr. Stuart Holland: I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree with the remarks made by the Minister and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) about the tragic death of Guy Barnett, the late hon. Member for Greenwich. His commitment to development issues, not only in the Commons but in the Commonwealth and in developing countries, will be sorely missed.

The Minister cannot get away as easily from the matter of the IADB loan to Chile as he has tried to do.

Mr. Forth: Why not?

Mr. Holland: Because the reality is that the Inter-American Development Bank loan, with the World Bank and International Finance Corporation loan, and loans for projects currently under appraisal, total about £1,000 million. They have either been made or are in the pipeline. Apart from anything else, this includes $150 million support for a pulp and paper factory in a country with no press freedoms. Less than 3 per cent. of the total package will go to social development projects. The World Bank loan to Chile was passed by only 1·7 per cent. of the vote. Mr. Elliott Abrahams of the United States managed to persuade his master that the United States should abstain. What was the weakness in the Minister's case? Could he not handle his mistress and persuade her that he should have opposed this loan to what is still a dictatorship?

Mr. Patten: May I be permitted a brief reply to that question? Article VIII, section *5(f)* of the World Bank's articles prohibits the bank from being influenced in its decisions by the political character of the borrowing member concerned and requires such decisions to be based only upon economic considerations impartially weighed. We made perfectly clear before the General Assembly on 18 November, and our ambassador made clear on 20 November, what we think of the Chilean human rights record.

EC (Aid Ministers)

65. **Mr. Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the aid Ministers of other EEC countries; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Chris Patten: I chaired the Council of European Community Development Ministers on 11 November. The main topics covered were food aid reform, aid for population activities and programming of the sixth European development fund.

Mr. Cox: I note the Minister's reply and welcome the discussion on food aid, but what meaningful action will be taken in Europe to ensure that suitable food surpluses are made available to countries that face hunger and poverty? Is the Minister aware that such a policy would be received with much greater support in Britain than is the present policy, under which surplus food seems to be sold off at giveaway prices to eastern Europe and is then sold in those countries at enormous profits, which are made at the expense of British taxpayers?

Mr. Patten: I am pleased to say that, during our presidency of the Community, we secured reform of the Community's food aid regulation. That should now mean that food goes to the developing countries to meet their needs rather than as a means of surplus disposal. Food aid will now be better integrated with general Community development programmes, and the procedures will be streamlined so that people in emergencies get food far more rapidly. I think that that reform is one of the most important things that we achieved during our presidency and that that view is widely shared in Europe.

Administrative and Technical Services

66. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will expand schemes for the provision of administrative and technical services to developing countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: In recent years we have devoted increasing resources to the provision of skilled manpower and training in technical, administrative and other areas. Our programmes of technical co-operation are designed to build up the human resources of individual developing countries and are planned in close consultation with their Governments.

Mr. Baker: Is my hon. Friend aware that such programmes are strongly welcomed on this side of the House? Will he also see whether he can achieve a substantial expansion in the Voluntary Service Overseas programme for young people from the present figure of about 1,000 a year?

Mr. Patten: I hope that I can satisfy my hon. Friend on that. Our aid to the British volunteer programme has been increased by 113 per cent. in real terms since 1979 and it will increase by a further 11·5 per cent. next year, taking it to £8·6 million as opposed to about £2 million in 1979. That is a formidable record.

I am sure that the House is aware of the murder of the VSO's field director, Mr. Paul Hitchman, in Uganda last week. That was a reminder of the brave and committed work of many of our young volunteers overseas, and I am sure that the House would want to offer its condolences to Mrs. Hitchman.

Earl of Stockton (Tributes)

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): Since we last met, and in addition to the other sorrows that you have reported to us today, Mr. Speaker, we heard the sad news of the death of Harold Macmillan, the Earl of Stockton. We mourn his loss and send our deepest sympathies to his family.

We pay tribute to his memory and to a life which spanned the transition from empire to Commonwealth and Community; from the Victorian to our present Elizabethan age. His part in that history began in the trenches of the western front in the first world war, where he served with distinction. He was wounded three times, most seriously during the battle of the Somme. His experiences in that war—the slaughter of the trenches and the loss of so many of his friends—imbued him with a profound horror of war which remained with him throughout his life.

In his autobiography, he said of his generation:

"We almost began to feel a sense of guilt at not having shared the fate of our friends and comrades.

We certainly felt an obligation to make some decent use of the life that had been spared to us".

The phrase "some decent use" is a characteristic understatement.

Harold Macmillan entered this House as the Member for Stockton, a seat which he held from 1924 to 1945 with a break of only two years — 1929 to 1931. His subsequent choice of the title, Earl of Stockton, testifies to the affection and concern he felt for his constituency and its people. The deprivation which he saw there made its mark on him and left him determined to raise the standard of life for all the people of this country. His firm belief that economic freedom is a necessary condition for political freedom is one which he continued to stress throughout his political career.

He became a Minister during the second world war and proved outstandingly successful, first as a junior Minister to Herbert Morrison, for whom he developed a warm regard, and, secondly, as Minister Resident in Algiers, which gave him the ideal opportunity to exercise both his diplomatic and his administrative skills. He became virtually viceroy in the Mediterranean and played a major part in drafting the peace treaty with Italy and in saving Greece from Communism. The late Richard Crossman, who worked for Harold Macmillan at the time, paid him this tribute, describing him as

"a dashing man of action, self-confidently poised in his behaviour, gambling on his hunches and, when we lost, as we sometimes did, loyal to his subordinates".

Having been in office, it was a bitter blow to Harold Macmillan when the Conservative party lost the 1945 election and he lost his seat at Stockton. However, he soon returned as the Member for Bromley and set about framing a political approach which would take this country into the post-war era.

Harold Macmillan returned to office after the Conservative victory in 1951 as Minister for Housing. It was the post which made him a popular and widely acclaimed political personality. He combined a great organising ability with a zest for political communication. His success was a major contribution to the post-war improvement in living standards.

His achievements as Housing Minister were followed later by his subsequent work as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He understood the aspiration of people for a better way of life. Material success was, in Harold Macmillan's view, nothing to be ashamed of. With his characteristic flair for a popular idea, he was responsible for the introduction of premium bonds, which even today, 30 years later, are a part of the lives of millions of people.

When in 1957, after Suez, Harold Macmillan became Prime Minister, his first task was to restore Britain's confidence and standing in the world. He re-established the special relationship with the United States through his close friendships with President Eisenhower and President Kennedy. He made a substantial contribution to the relaxation of tension between the Soviet Union and the West, most notably through his work to achieve the nuclear test ban treaty.

As with so much of his life, he was motivated in the search for peace by his sombre memories from the great war. But he also understood that peace was best served by a strong defence, and at Nassau he negotiated the Polaris agreement which allowed Britain to continue to enjoy the protection of an independent nuclear deterrent.

Under his leadership, withdrawal from empire continued in as orderly and peaceful a way as possible. It was in character that such a radical policy was executed with such shrewd caution. There was no more telling political phrase than "the wind of change", which he pronounced during his African tour in 1960.

Harold Macmillan will also be remembered by his work for European co-operation, and in particular for paving the way for British membership of the European Community. The second world war persuaded him that a new political order was needed in Europe to heal the divisions that had caused the conflicts of 1914 and again of 1939. He saw most clearly that the emergence of Russia and America as global powers required a more unified European voice if her counsel were not to be lost.

As Prime Minister he launched a determined bid to secure British membership of the European Community, and, although his initiative was thwarted by the opposition of President de Gaulle, he nevertheless had the satisfaction of seeing his ambitions fulfilled when my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), as Prime Minister, secured British membership of the Community in 1972.

Harold Macmillan loved this House, and I believe the House returned his affection. There are only a handful now in the House who were Members with him. I recall vividly his dominance in the early years of the 1959 Parliament before illness compelled him to relinquish office in 1963.

In his retirement Harold Macmillan occupied a unique place in the nation's affections. He continued to play his role as Chancellor of the University of Oxford, a position he held for over a quarter of a century, and which gave him immense enjoyment. He wrote an autobiography full of insight into the age in which he had lived. And when, on his 90th birthday, he became the Earl of Stockton he found another public platform from which to stimulate, inspire and not least entertain us.

For over six decades Harold Macmillan served his country, as a man of courage, determination, wit, and compassion. He lived through a period torn by great conflict, political upheaval, social change and technological advance. But always Harold Macmillan kept his eye firmly and positively on the future.

[The Prime Minister]

He showed generations to come how to grasp the opportunities of the future, while never forgetting the legacy of the past. As he said on the closing page of the sixth and last volume of his autobiography:

"Nothing in my long experience or in my observations of the youth of today makes me fear that the people of Britain, in every walk of life, will shrink from the new challenge or fail to rise to the level of events.

But to do so they must restore and strengthen the moral and spiritual, as well as the material, base on which they have rested for so many generations through so many troubles and tribulations."

His vision of the future tells us as much about the man as it does about our country.

All of us, Mr. Speaker, today feel the greatness of the example set by Harold Macmillan and the corresponding magnitude of the nation's loss.

3.41 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): We pay tribute today to Harold Macmillan, Earl of Stockton, but I am sure that he would have been the last to object to my taking this opportunity to voice also the deep sorrow which Members in all parts of the House feel at the sudden and tragic deaths of two other parliamentarians, Guy Barnett and David Penhaligon, which you, Mr. Speaker, reported earlier. In every case, the deaths of these men diminish us all and we mourn with their families and loved ones.

Lord Stockton is remembered in many ways—as a soldier of great valour; as a scholar; as a business man who had the acumen to recognise a winner and sell Keynes's "General Theory" at a mere 5s., while selling the "Treatise on Money" at 30s. His theatrical abilities are recalled by many, friend and foe alike, with admiration and affection. By a few, they are, inevitably, recalled with an unworthy carping. Assessments of Lord Stockton's political career have also, inevitably, received mixed notices.

I simply say that here in these tributes in this House we assess the whole life of a man of great distinction, and that assessment must produce the conclusion that Harold Macmillan's honourable place in history was secured by the humanity, the breadth of vision and the courage that were his persistent attributes: attributes, indeed, made all the greater because they were continuously applied throughout his lifetime, both as rebel and as ruler. They were the qualities which enabled the product of imperial privilege to become the great decoloniser; the rich man to become the caustic critic of the causes and the results of poverty; the opponent of Communism to become the communicator with the Soviet Union and an architect of the test ban treaty; the angry young man to become, on his elevation to the House of Lords, the astringent old man.

Lord Stockton's bitter experience of the first world war and the ghosts of what Siegfried Sassoon called the "unreturning army that was youth" haunted him throughout his life. It produced a combination of values which, to his eternal credit, made Harold Macmillan an insistent supporter of a new system of international economic and social order as the alternative to war, and at the very same time such a remorseless opponent of the appeasement of Hitler and Mussolini as to take him into the Labour party Lobby and temporarily away from the Conservative Whip in the confidence motion of June 1936.

Harold Macmillan was obviously steadfast for causes, but for all his commitment, he was, of course, no romantic. He distrusted doctrine. Although he was a man of profound beliefs, he never let them slip into self-righteousness. Indeed, he embodied the great difference between ideals and dogma. He was, throughout his life, continual proof of the distinction that separates the real champion of conviction from the mere purveyor of prejudice.

Despite those virtues—indeed, possibly because of those virtues—Harold Macmillan was not a saintly or a sainted man. His droll dismissive humour, the way in which he turned Edwardian affectation into a wily weapon of politics, his long life in which he made enemies of friends as well as friends of enemies, and his capacity for what even one of his most admiring biographers has called hard ambition and even ruthlessness—all these human favours and frailties prevent any form of canonisation. And, as the Earl of Stockton himself might have said, just as well, too.

In that Macmillanite spirit of kindly candour, I say that death and distance cannot lend sufficient enchantment to alter the view that the period over which Harold Macmillan presided in the 1950s, while certainly and thankfully a period of rising affluence and confidence, was also a time of opportunities missed and of changes avoided. Harold Macmillan was not, of course, solely or even pre-eminently responsible for that, but we cannot but record with frustration the fact that the vigorous and perceptive attacker of the status quo in the 1930s became its emblem for a time in the 1950s, before returning to be its antagonist again in the 1980s.

However, none of that can change the history of a man who, from the furthest and most isolated Back Bench to the foremost high office, was, as the Prime Minister has said, concerned throughout his life with the condition of all of the people. Clearly, from that arose his insistence that one of the main objects of economic policy must be the pursuit of full employment. We pay tribute to him for continuing always to march under those colours. As from the 1930s to the 1960s he advocated and—in many ways, more important—administered for full employment, so in recent times in his speeches in the House of Lords he restated the case made 50 years before for positive policies and action to take proper advantage of the possibilities of the revolutions in technology.

In the words of his "The Middle Way" Harold Macmillan believed:

"The important thing is that society should be organised in such a way as to bring the economic system under conscious direction and control and that the increased production should be directed towards raising the standard of comfort and security of all of the people."

In his last speech on affairs before the Munich crisis in 1938 he drew attention to the devastating effects of social division. In probably one of the most brilliant and moving of the many contributions that he made in the House he said:

"in these home problems, it is not a question of mere geographical distance, but of the wide chasm made by the lack of imagination on the part of a portion of the people who have never been able really to have brought home to them . . . the problems that confront large masses of our fellow-countrymen. Those of us who attended Church last Sunday will have heard read, in the Gospel for the day, the . . . words of the parable of the Dives and Lazareth—terrifying words— . . . 'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.'."

He went on to speak of what he called

"That great imaginative gulf, that incapacity to bring home to people the true realities of what is going on in this country in the 20th century."

He defined that as one of the central problems confronting the Government of the day.

The fervent enemy of appeasement concluded that speech with an assertion that showed both boldness and sagacity in that context and presented a continuing challenge to politicians of all times. He said:

"The House of Commons is pressing . . . the Government day by day to a solution of the problems of rearmament and the dangers that may face us from foreign invasion. I wish the House would show the same enthusiasm to solve the problems of protecting the people against the insecurities of peace." —[*Official Report*, 24 June 1938; Vol. 337, c. 1439-40.]

I quote from that speech, for it appears to me that it crystallises so much of what Harold Macmillan sought to stand for throughout his life: the closing of gulfs in the standards of living, and understanding between areas, classes, systems and countries. Not, for him, an invertebrate consensus, but the toughest and most central demand of democratic politics.

Throughout his life Harold Macmillan worked and spoke in the knowledge that from the village, to the nation, to the global community, the great task of us all is to ensure, in his words, that

"the machines which enable men to conquer scarcity"

never become those that

"plunge him deeper into poverty"

or indeed into conflict.

That is the man to whom we pay tribute: one who believed and sought to show by active application that the great purpose of intellect, the imagination of which he spoke, was to use intelligence and strength for the humane and productive solution of practical problems. For that service, and the effort which throughout his lifetime he put into trying to meet his duties, we honour him without restraint.

3.50 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Each of our political movements has lost, during the recess, colleagues whom we will always remember with affection and whose contributions to parliamentary democracy we will sorely miss.

On behalf of the Liberal party I join the other leaders in paying tribute today to Harold Macmillan. Interestingly, in his younger years he was greatly influenced by the then Liberal leader, David Lloyd George, as could be seen from his involvement with Liberals in the organisation known as Political and Economic Planning, in the contents of "The Next Five Years" in 1935 and in "The Middle Way" in 1938.

That early experience did not, during his later period as Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party, cause him to take a kindly view of the Liberal party. One of Harold Macmillan's characteristics was a maliciously effective sense of humour, and in 1961, in a vain attempt to stem the Orpington tide, he declared:

"As usual the Liberals offer a mixture of sound and original ideas. Unfortunately, none of the sound ideas is original and none of the original ideas is sound."

The mutual antipathy between the Liberals and Harold Macmillan's party in the 1960s in no way diminishes our respect for his very considerable achievments. His deep concern for housing and employment, stemming from his early years as the hon. Member for Stockton, his restoration of Anglo-American relations after the disaster of Suez, his conduct of the transition to independence in Africa, and especially his unheeded warnings in South Africa of the wind of change, his steps towards European unity and his constructive dialogue with Moscow, which helped to secure the nuclear test ban treaty, mean that he will be remembered and appreciated beyond party boundaries.

Like most hon. Members now, I never served with Harold Macmillan in the House and my only personal recollections are of occasional meetings outside Parliament: that shuffling gait, the deliberately hesitant, pausing manner, the myopic glance at the notes, all leading to entertaining, moving and highly effective speeches. There can be few of us who can hope to make, beyond the age of 90, such major contributions to the nation's debates. His was a truly remarkable career, and we warmly salute it.

3.53 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties have eloquently described the life and work of Harold Macmillan. It will be for history eventually to form a judgment of his policies and achievements, although already the rather superficial judgments that were made shortly after his resignation are, 20 years later, being revised.

I should like to add my tribute, both as one who served him as Chief Whip throughout his first Administration and as a colleague in his Cabinet throughout the second, and as a colleague and a friend. I think that we would want to pay tribute to Harold Macmillan from the point of view that we all have in common, which is that of a parliamentarian. It was Parliament, and especially the House of Commons, which was the main interest in his life for more than 60 years. That was so from the time shortly after the end of the first world war when he came into the House as the Member for Stockton. I do not think that anyone ever knew the House more intimately than he did. After all, he was on the Back Benches for 14 years before he received his first appointment as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. That gave him every opportunity of getting to know the attitudes and changing currents with which we are familiar. For him, the Smoke Room was one of the most likeable clubs of those to which he belonged. Throughout his time, especially while Prime Minister, he never ceased to be there in the evenings at a time when the Smoke Room was used a great deal by all hon. Members and to keep in touch with them.

Harold Macmillan believed very much in working with the House in order to achieve his own purposes. As one or two here know, he did not find it easy to address the House and to try to influence it. To begin with, he found television a horrifying venture, and he was never really happy with the impersonality of radio. It was only later, on the great occasions, that he felt at home addressing conferences. It was very late in his life when he began to establish the reputation which he now has of a television performer. All these arts had to be developed, and he did so by getting to know the House better and better.

As Chief Whip, I remember reporting to Harold Macmillan as usual at 10 o'clock in the morning about events in the House the night before and the troubles over an amendment, about which discussion had still not ceased. He said, "Ask the Minister just to let this go. It will

[Mr. Edward Heath]

not be the end of the world if we accept the amendment." I was looking rather blank, when he said, "Well, yes, tell him, you know, that often you please an awful lot of people if you give them what they want." That is not always the sort of thing that a Chief Whip likes to hear, but when it comes it is wise advice.

Harold Macmillan had an innate sense of history as well as the experience of all his years in politics. This enabled him to put every contemporary problem into a historical context. He had a creative mind which enabled him to find a solution to so many of the contemporary problems with which he had to deal. That was how he came to handle the economic problems of his time, how he foresaw the era of the great powers, how he recognised that the days of colonial powers were over and how he saw that our future lay in Europe. That was how he came to handle the innumerable problems of those years and to deal with them as a member of the Cabinet and as Prime Minister. If he had been asked, "How would you most like to be remembered?", he would have said, "As a House of Commons man."

3.58 pm

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is customary on these occasions for the Father of the House to say some words supposedly on behalf of all Back Benchers, but I do not presume to do that on this occasion. I wish, however, to add a short tribute.

I first heard Harold Macmillan speak in 1936 at a conference of trade unions. I listened to him say—it was his constant theme thereafter—that we should deal with unemployment and that there was no moral case for sitting back and allowing the market to take charge of our lives. That was a theme which he pursued throughout his life. He was still saying the same thing 50 years later, and saying it with the sincerity that he had displayed in 1936.

The Prime Minister referred to the wind of change speech. I have thought more than once about why he made it, and perhaps in some ways it can be traced back to his own history and that of his firm. Macmillan, the publisher, established its firm in India more than 100 years ago.

It is not always remembered that Harold Macmillan had a special interest in and concern about India. Indeed, when there were some divisions in the Conservative party in 1947 during the Second Reading debate on the Indian Independence Bill, Harold Macmillan on behalf of the Conservative party, which was then in Opposition, expressed support for India's independence. I have sometimes thought of his close connection with India. He returned to India more than once and was delighted when he was made a patron of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. That honour may have led him to think about Africa and to make his wind of change speech there some 20 years later, perhaps inspired by what he knew of and believed and cared about in India.

Others have referred to all Harold Macmillan's achievements. I do not intend to do that. I do not think that he would have wanted this to be an occasion of mourning. He had too much, as has been said, of an impish sense of humour for that. The other day, the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) reminded me of a hilarious evening when he telephoned me and asked to have dinner with Harold Macmillan because he wanted somebody to gossip to him. The jokes that we heard—I dare not tell some of them!

I recall an occasion when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was present, together with Lord Wilson, Lord Home and myself. Harold Macmillan was due to address an audience. He said that he wondered what was the proper collective noun for a group of former Prime Ministers. After all, every group has its own collective noun—a flock of sheep, a herd of cows, a pride of lions. After a typical pause, he said, "Perhaps it should be a lack of principles."

The only other story that I wish to tell concerns an occasion on which he said to me, again in another enjoyable conversation, "Do you know, I think you and I ought to form the next Cabinet together." I said, "I think that that would be a good idea. I am sure that we could do better than the present lot." He said, "Yes, perhaps we could." Here I utter a word of advice to the Prime Minister. He went on to say, "But we cannot have too many young men in it. They will only try to push us out."

Harold Macmillan, with all his great talents, enjoyment and mastery of this House, would not have wanted us to be too solemn this afternoon. We celebrate his great achievements as a parliamentarian. He was a master parliamentarian in every way. He was a man of great sincerity. He had certain principles to which he stuck, whether they were popular or unpopular. As has been said, he was a man of the House of Commons. We should pay tribute to the fact that the House of Commons attracted men of his stature, and I believe that today it is continuing to attract men and women of similar stature to continue to continue in that way.

4.3 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): We remember a remarkable man. We have heard from people who were hon. Members with Harold Macmillan and knew him for many years. For my generation of *New Statesmen* readers, brought up on a weekly Vicky cartoon, he was Supermac — a lovable old rogue. I remember his characteristics in that period as Prime Minister. He was the first Prime Minister to try to make Britain a member of the European Community, and the first Prime Minister to understand that we must rid ourselves of our colonial responsibilities in Africa. Perhaps also for a generation in which Suez was a dramatic event, it is wise to remember the man who was first in and first out.

I shall add no more than the words that he himself used in another place — words which we did not hear, but words upon which we could well reflect — in his remarkable speech in January 1985. He concluded by saying:

"It is for the next generation—it will not be for me but for my successors—to make the decision. Should we just slowly and majestically sink—not perhaps drastically or tragically, but go slowly down like a great ship—or shall we make a new determined and united effort, putting, as far as we can the party aside? There must be parties, of course, but there can be co-operation and even national governments. Let us do the latter and then historians of the future will not describe the ending of this century as the beginning of the decline and fall of Britain but as the beginning of the new and glorious renaissance."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 January 1985; Vol. 459, c 254.]

4.5 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): The Macmillan family and its widespread connections are not as broadly represented in the House as they were when I first became an hon. Member. On behalf of the family, I hope that I may be allowed to express what I am sure is the appreciation of all of us for the generous tribute that has been paid this afternoon to the memory of Harold Macmillan. It would not be seemly for me to add to it. He was my friend before I joined his family. He taught me much of what I have learnt of the statecraft of Whitehall and Westminster. I know well that, beneath all the histrionics, he served two great goals all his life: the betterment of the condition of the people and the maintenance and possible extension of Britain's influence in the world. I am grateful to the House for letting me add my tribute to those that have already been paid.

4.6 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I add my tribute to the memory of the Earl of Stockton from the citizens of that town, whom I now have the honour to represent in this place. I do so as a citizen of Stockton who, for the first five years of his life, had Harold Macmillan as his Member of Parliament, although I must say that the memory is not clear. I remember also my parents speaking about Harold Macmillan and, indeed—reference must be made to this—about Lady Dorothy, who took the hearts of the people of Stockton in a way that was reflected in Harold Macmillan's later life.

It is a testament to the affection and concern that Harold Macmillan learnt and showed in Stockton that he chose the Earldom for his title when he went to the other place. I am sure that the town of Stockton will remember him in the same way. The name will permanently be remembered and will remain part of his family. I have no doubt that many people in Stockton will suffer a great loss now that he has gone and is not carrying forward the flame that he picked up in Stockton—his compassion for the unemployed, which came through so strongly in his later life.

4.8 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I join my parliamentary colleagues, both friend and foe in political terms, in paying tribute to the life of public service dedicated by my predecessor as the hon. Member for Stockton. I did not have the privilege of meeting him personally, but I know very well many people, from all ranks and from all parties, who did. Without exception, they call him to mind with genuine warmth and with real affection. Even his most implacable political enemies from those days pay tribute to his commitment and to what the noble Lord Wilson of Rievaulx has described as his "dedicated professionalism". Lord Wilson also conferred upon him what he called "a profound sense of history." Such an observation was so aptly precise.

Although we all know how unkind a commentator history can be in looking back over the way in which we conduct our affairs, it was that very attribute — his profound sense of history—that enabled the noble Earl to pass such telling comment in recent times on measures being implemented nationally. The last year must have been bitterly ironic for the man who, 51 years before, had fought a general election on his own personal manifesto, calling for pubic control of transport and gas.

Indeed, some of my colleagues may be as surprised as I was to read of the Earl of Stockton's rebellious spirit and independent judgment, to learn of his single-minded approach to the choice of Division Lobby on certain issues, and to learn that it was he who, in his book "The Middle Way", written as early as 1928, described the stock exchange as "a casino"—a phrase used frequently by some of my hon. Friends even today, and almost shanghaied by the leader of a certain party over Christmas.

Harold Wilson, in his book "A Prime Minister on Prime Ministers", referred to Harold Macmillan as a Tory democrat, and asserted:

"Macmillan's Tory democracy was based on those he came to know and love in Stockton, the workers—and, in the years he represented Stockton, the unemployed."

If one compares the present with the past, little, in those specific terms, has changed, save that the lesson that I learn from those conditions of deprivation is a Socialist lesson. The common ground that remains is that of compassion and democracy.

The individual contribution of that one man to the world of politics, national and global, was quite prodigious, equalled by fewer than a handful of Britons in this century. Would that we were all able, regardless of party, to emulate his commitment, match his dedication and, above all, reflect his sensitivity and compassion.

4.11 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As one of those who, as the Prime Minister put it, is a member of the small band of those who were in the House with Harold Macmillan, I should like to refer briefly to his kindness and thoughtfulness to all young Members of Parliament of all parties, not least to opponents. On 4 July 1963 I asked him "if he will ensure that legislation presented to this House is not drafted in obscure language."

Harold Macmillan replied:

"I have every sympathy with the hon. Member's objective. However, I am afraid that, in order to achieve precision in legislation which is complex and often technical, it is not always possible to avoid an impression of obscurity."

I then asked briefly:

"I accept the fact that the Parliamentary draftsmen must try to prevent those who would pretend to misunderstand from doing so, but is it not also important that we laity should understand legislation?"

This is a vintage and skilful Harold Macmillan reply:

"I know that this is a difficult problem. I would remind the House of the very wise words of Sir James Stephen, one of our greatest authorities, who pointed out that since legislation is often the subject of litigation it is absolutely necessary not only that it should appear to be simple to those who read it in good faith, but actually precise. That is a very difficult art. Many things are simple. Let us take the sentence: 'When John met his uncle in the street he took off his hat.' That is a clear sentence, but it is capable of at least six different meanings. The point about legislation is that the courts have to interpret it in litigation based upon it, and it is therefore essential that it should be not so much simple as precise." — [*Official Report*, 4 July 1963; Vol. 680, c 583-84.]

That was all, incidentally, in Prime Minister's Question Time.

The following week I heard an authoritative voice behind me in a Corridor in the House say, "Dalyell, come here." That was the Prime Minister. He said, "I was not unsympathetic towards your question, so I shall arrange for the chief parliamentary draftsman to show you exactly why I gave the answer that I did." I was a very junior Member of the House, and the following day Sir Noel Hutton appeared, on Prime Ministerial instruction. He

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

was an extremely distinguished QC, and he came armed with endless volumes. I have not been taken apart like that since I was a first-year student—in the nicest way.

The point is that the Prime Minister should go to such trouble for a young opponent to whom he owed absolutely nothing and who had been an embarrassment to him in the West Lothian by-election before the night of the long knives, in which his party lost its deposit in our rolling countryside. It was an act of generosity that is not forgotten.

The Prime Minister referred to Dick Crossman. I was the latter's PPS. Crossman always said that when he was extremely ill Macmillan in North Africa made arrangements that saved his life. I am sure that there are many examples of the personal kindnesses of this man.

Power Plant Industry

4.15 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the further job losses in the power plant industry."

The matter is immediate because last Friday NEI Parsons declared a further 800 workers redundant. That brings to over 1,700 the total number of jobs that have been gone at NEI in the past year. The matter is urgent because NEI is a pillar of Tyneside's industrial base. It is the largest private sector employer in the county. The matter is also urgent because those redundancies were wholly avoidable, as are other redundancies in that industrial sector — I am thinking particularly of Babcock's just before Christmas.

The fault most certainly does not lie with the company —not with the owners, the investors, the managers or the work force. The company has fought a tremendous battle for overseas work. Production utilises the very latest technology and phase II of the company's investment programme involves £30 million of further investment. Industrial relations at the plant, involving a highly skilled work force, are good.

The problem is lack of orders. No domestic orders have been placed in the industrial sector since 1978. The leader in today's edition of Newcastle's *The Journal* is headed "800 victims of inertia". It states:

"Whenever hundreds of jobs are lost in a community—and it is not an exceptional occurrence in the North—there is bound to be disappointment, concern, an understandable degree of bitterness . . . What is beyond question, however, is that bitterness will turn to justifiable anger if it is felt that action could have been taken to save and secure jobs which have instead been unnecessarily sacrificed.

And this is surely the case with the 800 redundancies announced at the end of last week at NEI Parsons, which has been waiting for years for a domestic order for a coal-fired power station.

The Government is in a position to place such an order but has refused to do so".

That leader speaks for the whole of the north-east of England.

The Central Electricity Generating Board acknowledges the requirement for coal-fired power stations, yet the Secretary of State does nothing. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) lays the blame at the door of the Secretary of State for Energy, and he is right to do so.

The power supply industry must be maintained beyond the mid-1990s, and we should debate the Secretary of State's failure to do so.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the further job losses in the power plant industry."

I listened with care and sympathy to what the hon. Gentleman said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House. However, I hope that he will find other ways of raising the matter.

Ministerial Statements

4.18 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If Harold Macmillan were here today, he would be surprised, as large numbers of the British public must be, that no statement is being made on what arrangements the Government are making to stop many elderly people freezing to death and, secondly, that no statement is being made on the crash of the Army convoy over the weekend. Can you say, Mr. Speaker, whether the Government, at any stage, have said that they intend to make statements on those two important matters and, if not, have you expressed any concern on behalf of the House about the absence of such statements?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I sympathise with you about your voice and hope that I will not cause you any difficulties. You will understand that we do not wish to have too many applications under Standing Order No. 20, so we should discipline ourselves accordingly. I deliberately did not table a Standing Order No. 20 application because I hoped that a statement would be made about the appalling difficulties being faced by many of our elderly people during this bitter winter weather. It is disgraceful that no statement is being made about whether the trigger arrangements will be implemented so that some elderly people on supplementary benefit may receive additional heating benefits.

I am aware that there is a question tabled for tomorrow, but that is no substitute for a statement from the Secretary of State because, at most, only three or four hon. Members will be able to ask supplementary questions to question No. 7 which is tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I hope that tomorrow such a statement will be made because the difficulties being experienced by many elderly people should preoccupy the House. It is disgraceful that there has been no statement today.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall deal with one matter at a time. Regarding the matter raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, the hon. Gentleman has question No. 7 on the Order Paper tomorrow. I am not responsible for any statements by the Government. On the question of the accident, it would be perfectly legitimate to raise this during tomorrow's debate on the Army. Again, I am not responsible for any statement.

Hon. Member for Workington (Allegations)

4.20 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order to seek your guidance following allegations made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) in a debate on the security services on 15 December. I would have raised the matter with you sooner, but for the fact that the hon. Gentleman made his attack initially under the cloak of anonymity and it was not until immediately after the rising of the House for the Recess that my name came to be publicly linked with his accusations. Therefore, I am availing myself of the first possible opportunity to draw this matter to your attention.

During a 56-minute speech the hon. Gentleman attacked various individuals, including the head of the Civil Service and my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, impugning the honour and integrity of both. Among the targets of his attacks were two Conservative Members of Parliament whom he declined to name and who, he claimed, had engaged in a conspiracy with officers of MI5 to bring about the downfall of Her Majesty's Government by unconstitutional means during the second Administration of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx.

He said at column 783 that only one of the two hon. Members was still in the House and that he would approach that individual and ask him "to make a personal statement". Two days later I received a letter from the hon. Gentleman stating that Mr. Peter Wright had "identified" me—whatever that might mean—and calling on me to make a personal statement to the House.

The very next day a highly regarded member of the parliamentary press lobby informed me that he had been told by the hon. Gentleman himself that Sir Stephen Hastings and I had been sent letters by the hon. Gentleman, identifying us. I understand that the hon. Gentleman subsequently denied informing the press. However, by whatever process of telepathy the existence of his letters came to be communicated to the press—certainly neither Sir Stephen nor I did so—our names came by the weekend to be publicly linked with his most grave accusations.

Asserting that it was

"the biggest political scandal of this century"

and that it

"surpasses in importance the Zinoviev letter",

the hon. Gentleman accused me, and our former and distinguished colleague, Sir Stephen Hastings, of being

"beyond the law"

and

"involved in action against the Crown."

He alleged that, as part of a smear campaign designed to bring about the downfall of the Wilson Government, we acted as "conduits" for bogus information which we knew "came illegally from within MI5."

The hon. Gentleman further declared:

> "They did not stop it, nor did they report it to the Home Secretary. They just passed it on in the knowledge that it would destabilise the Labour Prime Minister and his Government."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 783-4.]

The charge that the hon. Gentleman has levelled against us is, in effect, of engaging in a treasonable conspiracy to bring down Her Majesty's Government.

[Mr. Churchill]

Few graver charges can be made, especially against a Member of this honourable House. Indeed, it remains a capital offence for which, uniquely, the gallows are preserved to this day.

May I say that I have never at any time worked for or with MI5. Nor have I ever knowingly even met any individual from MI5. I have certainly never engaged in any conspiracy, treasonable or otherwise, with MI5 or with any of its officers, past or present. So far as they relate to me, the hon. Gentleman's accusations are a seamless tissue of falsehoods. Furthermore, Sir Stephen Hastings, with whom I have been in touch and who, like me, has issued writs for libel against *The Observer* and two of its correspondents, has asked me to state on his behalf that the charges against him are also without foundation.

In the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I must ask you whether it is in order for an hon. Gentleman to make such accusations against a fellow hon. Member without producing any evidence to substantiate the charge. If you agree that that represents a flagrant abuse of the privileges of this House, I should be grateful if you would consider referring the hon. Gentleman's conduct to the Committee of Privileges. Finally, I challenge the hon. Gentleman either to repeat his accusations outside the protection of parliamentary privilege or to withdraw them unequivocally.

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, the rule is that it is not in order to reflect in debate on the conduct of another hon. Member except on a substantive motion which admits of a distinct vote of the House. In the debate on 15 December, to which the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention, the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) reflected on the conduct of two other Members. If he had identified them, the Chair would have intervened to enforce that rule. He did not do so, so there was no basis on which the Chair could take action. Nor can I take action now. However, if the hon. Gentleman alleges that this is a matter of privilege, he should write to me in the usual way and I shall consider it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I give you notice that I intend to take the opportunity of replying in full detail.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Trafford Park Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—[*Mr. Malone.*]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.28 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise in respect of certain provisions in the Bill on which it is proposed to have a Second Reading debate in the House today. Clause 1 requires all local authorities to keep a rate fund revenue account, and the Inner London education authority is a local authority for that purpose. Will you, Mr. Speaker, consider treating the Bill as a hybrid Bill? Clause 7 provides for the maximum rate precept of each designated authority to be determined in accordance with schedule 2. If any hon. Members have had the opportunity to look at schedule 2, they will recognise, not only its complexity, but the need to have a considerable understanding of algebra to make any sense of it.

Within designated authorities, subparagraphs 2(1) and (2) of the schedule include what is called a "T" factor, calculated in accordance with paragraphs 3(6) and 4 of schedule 2 which is intended to pick up the effects of the teachers' pay settlement. The formula for designated authorities in sub-paragraphs 2(3) to 2(6) of schedule 2 exclude that T factor.

Sub-paragraphs 2(1), 2(2) and 2(6) relate to types of local authorities which are, or may be, local education authorities. Within the category of local authorities which are designated authorities, the Inner London education authority is the only one with the functions of a local education authority which does not have the T factor applied to it. It is, therefore, arguable in terms of hybridity that among that category, the ILEA's financial interests —and therefore the financial interests of Inner London ratepayers—are treated differently from the interests of all other local authorities and their ratepayers. That could accordingly be argued to come within the definition of a hybrid Bill, as given in "Erskine May", as:

"a public Bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interests of other persons or bodies of the same category or class."

In the argument on a similar point relating to what is now the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, you held, Mr. Speaker, that there was no hybridity as the category of constituent authorities — the London boroughs—were a genuine class, and the fact that the City of London was not within that class did not alter the position. In the present case, however, the definition of ILEA as a local authority for the principal purposes of the Bill — remedying the rate support grant position — distinguishes it from the City under the 1984 Act.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that there is a prima facie case for saying that this is a hybrid Bill. I ask you to consider this submission most carefully in view of its complexity. To save any risk of further damaging your vocal chords, perhaps your could let the House know your decision in due course.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a point related to hybridity. I apologise for the lack of notice, but, as you will appreciate, the Bill was published only the day before

the House went into recess, and its effects have been difficult to determine, even for those expert in this complex area.

The essence of private legislation, as I understand it, is that there is within any enactment or proposed enactment an injurious affection of a technical, private interest exercised in an arbitrary manner within a single statutory classification in that legislation. If such injurious affection can be shown to exist, such legislation may come—I emphasise "may come" — within the ambit of the Standing Orders for private business in this House, and if it is a public Bill, it is therefore declared hybrid, being subject to both sets of Standing Orders.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, schedule 2 contains a number of complex mathematical formulae which seek to define classes of local authority. I quote the ruling of Mr. Speaker Hylton-Foster in 1963—a predecessor of yours, Mr. Speaker—from the current edition of "Erskine May", on page 896. He said:

"I think that a hybrid bill can be defined as a public bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interests of other persons or bodies of the same category or class."

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland, I am concerned that in the case of a borough the application of this formula may result in a very different injurious affection on both the borough and its inhabitants than on those to which that formula refers. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that in this respect, a borough corporate can be regarded as a private corporation just as any ratepayer in the borough can be regarded as a private individual.

The submission I make, therefore, is that if it can be shown that within any one of these classes of formulae the effect on any such borough, any of the burgesses or ratepayers, would be injurious, as distinct from the effect of other classes, the Bill should be regarded as subject to the Standing Orders for private business and, therefore, hybrid.

I do not necessarily expect a reply now. However, that is the position with which we are faced because of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker: I can deal with the matter despite my vocal chords, if the House will bear with me. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for having given me notice of his point of order, and also to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), because I understand that he was making inquiries about this last week. That has given me an opportunity to look very carefully into the question of hybridity. I and my predecessors have frequently ruled that a Bill that concerns a matter of public policy and deals with private or local interests as members of a class without singling out any one of a class for adverse treatment is not hybrid.

The hon. Members for Newham, South and for Copeland both argue that because ILEA is dealt with separately from other authorities, the Bill is prima facie hybrid. I must tell them, however, that the Inner London education authority has, since its inception as the governing body for education in the inner boroughs of London, been treated as a class of its own in the metropolis. That was the case both in the London Government Act 1963 and in the Local Government Bill of 1984. I must, therefore, rule that dealing with ILEA separately does not render the Bill hybrid.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), but I have nothing to add to my statement.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for not giving you notice, but I could not do so until I discovered that a money resolution was attached to the Bill. Part II, which deals with its financial effects, states:

"It is not envisaged that there will be any significant increase in the amount available for grants."

I have gone through the Bill, but I cannot find any clause in italics. In other words, I cannot find any financial clause, yet a money resolution is attached to the Bill. The Bill was not properly presented to the House, as it appeared that it had no financial effects. Yet today we find that, in fact, financial effects are covered by a money resolution which we must debate later this evening.

Given the way in which the Bill has been presented and the fact that it has financial effects—or there would not be a money resolution—I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Bill has not been properly presented. The Government must consider what they are trying to do in presenting such a Bill. The House must decide how to consider the Bill, because it clearly has financial aspects.

"Erskine May" is quite clear that if a Bill has financial aspects, the clauses which relate to the financial aspects must be printed in italics. As they have not been printed in italics in the Bill, I submit that the Bill has not been properly presented to the House.

Mr. Speaker: On page 10, in part III, clause 16, the Bill states in italics:

"*There shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament any increase attributable to this Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.*"

A money resolution means, not that more money will be spent, but that it will be spent under a new authority. The matter is quite in order.

Dr. Cunningham: I accept what you have said, Mr. Speaker, about ILEA being a unique authority. It is the only single-purpose authority of its kind. I also accept what you have said about the 1962 and the 1984 Acts. However, my point is different. My point is that, for the purposes of today's Bill, ILEA is taken in a class with other authorities with educational functions. They are given consideration on the basis of the T factor that I mentioned in working out the implications of the Bill for them, but ILEA is not. Therefore, within the terms of the Bill, ILEA is treated differently from the other authorities in the same class in the Bill. That is the point at issue, and it is not a question of the treatment of ILEA, as in the previous cases that I have mentioned.

Mr. Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have looked at this with the greatest of care, as the House would expect me to do when a question of hybridity is likely to be raised. I am satisfied that the Bill is not hybrid, for the reasons that I have stated.

Mr. Spearing: I apologise for returning to this matter, Mr. Speaker. We are subject to time constraints, and I have already apologised to you for not having been able to raise the point by notice. My point of order was not that raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). It was a new and a fresh point of order, and when you replied to him with the ruling that you have just reiterated, I hope that you were not attempting to include

[Mr. Spearing]

my point of order, which I hope can be dealt with as a separate issue, in an informal or formal manner, as you so please.

Mr. Speaker: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He was dealing with the formula under which local authorities are rate-capped and how it may affect this authority. In view of the difficulty that I am facing today, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about this matter.

Mr. McWilliam: Further to my point of order, Mr. Speaker. You drew my attention to page 10, which I had read. It says:

"There shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament any increase attributable to this Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act".

"Erskine May" is clear that the financial aspects of any Bill should relate to that Bill and not to any other Act. It is with that point that I find the greatest difficulty. The general financial clause seems to say that money for the Bill can come out of any other aspects of Supply to which the House has already agreed. This seems not to be in order with the general way in which we deal with financial procedures and does not, in a reasonable manner, relate to the way in which we should deal with legislation that concerns finance.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman raises a technical point. As far as I can see this is in order, but in view of what he has said I shall look carefully at the matter before we come to the money resolution.

4.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As the House knows, the purpose of the Bill is to validate the practice that my Department and the Welsh Office have both adopted since 1981-82, in line with the wishes of local government, in calculating relevant and total expenditure for block grant and rate limitation, to allow that practice to continue on a proper basis for the remaining years of the present system; and to set rate and precept limits for 1987-88. It deals also with a much lesser problem in Scotland. I explained the background in my statement on 16 December. The House may find it helpful if I expand a little on what I said then, before describing briefly the provisions of the Bill.

I shall begin by explaining the concepts of relevant and total expenditure. "Relevant expenditure" is essentially the net expenditure of local authorities after netting off income such as fees and charges. The Secretary of State must take this into account in determining the total amount of grant which should go to local authorities each year. "Total expenditure" is a narrower concept. It is broadly relevant expenditure less specific and supplementary grants. An authority's total expenditure is the total which is eligible for block grant. Neither relevant nor total expenditure is a measure of gross spending.

Total expenditure is taken into account in determining grant related poundages, multipliers, and, perhaps most important the individual entitlements to grants of local authorities. Total expenditure also has an important role in rate limitation. I select authorities for rate limitation if in my view their total expenditure is excessive. The expenditure levels that I determine are levels of total expenditure, and I calculate rate limits from these.

Before taking the House through the history of events, I should also say something about local authority funds and accounts. Every local authority is required to keep a general rate fund or its equivalent, into which receipts are paid and from which liabilities are discharged. Each will maintain, though not required to by statute, an account of its main revenue transactions, often called a rate fund revenue account. Depending on the nature of the authority, it will have a number of other named funds or accounts, some required by statute, some not — for instance, the housing revenue account, the direct labour organisation revenue account, the superannuation fund, the loans fund, special funds, including capital funds set up under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, and trading accounts. This Bill stems from the relationship of the general rate fund—what is usually called the rate fund revenue account—to these and other funds and accounts.

The central issue is whether the rate fund for the purposes of calculating relevant and total expenditure should be interpreted in the wide sense of treating all other funds and accounts, such as special funds, the housing revenue account, and accounts of trading undertakings merely as sub-divisions of the rate fund, or in the narrow sense of seeing the rate fund as a separate and distinct entity from these other funds and accounts. Under the wide interpretation, expenditure falling to be defrayed from the rate fund is the entire expenditure of the authority but does not include internal contributions between funds and accounts. Under the narrow interpretation of the rate fund, its expenditure excludes expenditure charged direct to the other funds and accounts, but includes contributions to those funds and accounts. Since the beginning of the present grant system, my Department and the Welsh Office have adopted the narrow interpretation in line with the wishes of local government.

What happened was as follows: from late 1979 the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980, which established block grant, was passing through Parliament. The Act defines relevant and total expenditure, on which block grant is paid, essentially as expenditure falling to be defrayed from the rate fund. It was only after the Act was passed, and after the first block grant settlement had been made in December 1980, that the issue emerged clearly. This was when draft grant claim forms were sent to the local authority associations which made it clear that the Department envisaged using the wide interpretation for calculating authorities' entitlements.

The local authority associations were very concerned about the proposal to interpret references to the rate fund in the 1980 Act in this way. They argued that the narrow view of the rate fund was an equally possible interpretation of the Act and that the wide view was not consistent with accepted and sensible accounting practices.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): The Conservative-controlled associations were particularly vociferous in making this point. It was also welcomed by Department of the Environment Ministers. They hoped to encourage housing revenue account profits which the Government had made legal by the 1980 Act.

Mr. Ridley: I am speaking from memory, but I believe that all the local authority associations preferred the narrow rather than the wide interpretation. The only exception was the London borough of Wandsworth, which at that time was led by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). He believed that it would have been better at that time, or at a later stage, to use the other definition. I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's second point. I was not in the Department at that time. However, I have more to tell him about what happened.

In considering the issue, Ministers had at that time to weigh the two differing interpretations of the 1980 Act references to the rate fund and the disruption to local authorities' accounting practices which would have stemmed from a decision to proceed with a wide view of the rate fund. The Government therefore decided to accept the strongly argued and unanimous views—this is the answer to the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts)—of the local authority associations and adopt a narrow definition for calculating grant entitlements under the 1981-82 rate support grant settlement, thus continuing what had been existing practice for many years under earlier legislation. A circular letter to this effect was sent to local authorities on 13 February 1981. No queries were raised and the approach taken was generally welcomed.

The change in 1981-82 to the local authority approach to the rate fund was made on the basis that for 1982-83 the issue would be reconsidered with the associations.

A paper was put to the local authority associations in April 1981. Given the unanimous acceptance of the interpretation adopted for 1981-82, this proposed that the local authority approach to total expenditure should be continued for 1982-83 and suggested a study to look at the pros and cons of changing to the wider approach in the longer term. The local authority associations continued, however, to press strongly the view that there should be no switch to the wide approach and that there was no need for any study to look at this alternative approach. The Department agreed to put the issue on one side but indicated that

"they might come back to the group with proposals in future if they seemed necessary".

From then on, the Government operated the block grant system on the basis of the narrow view of the rate fund. During that period there were a number of legal challenges, brought on a variety of grounds, to the Secretary of State's decisions on rate support grant and rate limitation. But in those proceedings no legal point was taken against the narrow view, nor did local government auditors question the practice.

The issue re-emerged last year when it was discovered that a number of returns of expenditure from local authorities did not conform to normal practice on expenditure. Several authorities had decided to show contributions to special funds, even though they appeared to have a deficit on the rate fund revenue account and there was apparently no liability for which the money was being set aside. Another authority had decided that in 1984-85 transfers from a special fund should not count as income-reducing expenditure even though, in a previous year, it had counted transfers to special funds as expenditure. This was directly contrary to the approach which the Government had taken in 1981 at the request of the local authority associations.

It appeared that these devices were designed to increase block grant entitlement at the expense of other authorities. We estimate that the authorities concerned could gain a total of £38 million in grant because of them.

Although the practices had been accepted by the auditors in a number of cases, my Department was very doubtful whether it could accept them as a basis for paying grant. One set of authorities appeared in effect to be conjuring money for special funds out of the air solely to increase their grant entitlements. The approach of the other authority ran completely counter to normal practice. If accepted, it would have meant that the Government tolerated two completely opposite practices on the question of calculating total expenditure. That, clearly, was not on. I should say here that my Department has written to the authorities concerned seeking an explanation of the figures that they have submitted.

In September, in deciding how to respond to these cases, I looked closely at the definitions of relevant and total expenditure. I was concerned that the accepted practice did not correspond to the statute. I decided that it was essential to seek the Attorney-General's view. He supported counsel's opinion that the treatment of total expenditure which the Government had operated at the request of the local authority associations was indeed incorrect in law. Transfers between funds and accounts within the rate fund were not expenditure. Expenditure took place only when an authority had liabilities in the outside world and met these from the general rate fund. Any fund or account, whether statutory or non-statutory, which a council set up was simply a part of the rate fund earmarked for a particular purpose. I received the advice of the Attorney-General in later October and the Government decided to take urgent action.

As I have explained, the Government had originally responded positively and constructively to the strongly held views of the local authority associations on the interpretation of expenditure, but, in view of the cases which emerged last year and of the further legal advice, the Government had no alternative but to legislate. Without such legislation, all past decisions which involved the concepts of total or relevant expenditure would have been in doubt. It would have been quite improper to take further decisions about rate support or rate limitation without securing the legal position. I came to the House in December as soon as I was able to present the Government's fully worked up proposals for handling the problem. It would have been quite irresponsible to come without such a solution and face local government with the great uncertainty that that would have caused.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): The Secretary of State said that he came to the House at the earliest possible moment. On 3 December, some weeks after he knew about the problem, he made his third rate support grant statement to the House, although he knew that the basis upon which it was assessed was open to doubt under the system which he intended to tell us about on 16 December.

Mr. Ridley: That third consultative paper was intended for discussions with the local authorities. I have not made a decision about next year's rate support grant, although I hope to make a statement very soon on that subject. No rate support grant settlement is legal until it has been approved by the House. I shall be unable to invite the

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House to approve the rate support grant settlement until this Bill has become an Act. The House might like to remember that without the Bill becoming an Act, it will be impossible to pay grant for 1987-88.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): No Conservative Member blames my right hon. Friend for the problems with which he is faced. It was his misfortune to be sitting in the chair and holding the parcel when the music stopped. As the Bill effectively tries to maintain the status quo, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing either an amendment or a new clause to stop the present ratchet effect, which reduces the rate support grant for counties such as Hertfordshire? If it were introduced for 1988-89, it could continue until the new Conservative Government were able to produce their new rate reforms after the next general election.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I should be even more grateful if he would not seek to add to the Bill, which is already complex enough, something that is of a completely different nature, which would freeze the present pattern of grants for 1988-89 and thereafter. I agree with my hon. Friend that it will be a blessing and a godsend when the new Green Paper proposals are implemented by an Act of Parliament. In the meantime, it will become increasingly difficult to operate the present system. This is neither the time nor the place to deal with that, although the suggestion of some sort of freezing of the system is not totally unattractive.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State be absolutely precise and tell the House when he was first advised of this state of affairs? We want to be told, not when the Attorney-General confirmed it, but when the Secretary of State was first advised of the illegality of the Government's position.

Mr. Ridley: I think I told the hon. Gentleman that I first became aware of the problem in September.

Dr. Cunningham: When?

Mr. Ridley: Without consulting my files I cannot give the precise date in September, but let me make it clear that this was brought as a possible problem upon which it would be correct to seek legal advice. We sought legal advice from counsel and then had to seek a second opinion, and I consulted my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. It was not until we were certain about the legal position that I realised the problem would have to be dealt with.

The main purpose of the Bill is to allow my Department and the Welsh Office to continue with the practice adopted to date, and supported by the general body of local government, for calculating relevant and total expenditure. The Bill will enable transfers to and from this account to be defined in a way which replicates current practice on expenditure; that is, that total expenditure should be the net expenditure of the rate fund revenue account.

Clause 1 and schedule 1 require authorities to keep a rate fund revenue account and list those accounts separate from it. Clause 2 sets out the practices to be observed in compiling the account. Clause 3 defines relevant and total expenditure in relation to the rate fund revenue account. These clauses apply from the financial year 1987-88 onwards. Clause 4 validates all things done for rate support grant purposes since 1981. There are, however, further decisions on rate support grant to be taken for all years since 1981-82. Clauses 4 and 5 provide for these.

For 1981-82 and 1982-83, only the conclusive calculation of block grant remains to close the books. The Bill provides that these calculations shall be done on the basis of the figures in the last supplementary reports made for those years. For the years 1983-84 to 1986-87, there are outstanding supplementary reports to be made. The Bill provides that these shall be made on the same basis as reports for the years 1987-88 onwards. As I have explained, authorities have in practice kept what is usually called a rate fund revenue account. Clearly, it is not possible retrospectively to require authorities to keep rate fund revenue accounts. Therefore, the calculations will be based on the notional existence of such an account.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): I think my right hon. Friend will agree that clause 5 is a little obscure and as a consequence seems to be open to a variety of interpretations, one of which is giving rise to fears that the basis of rate support grant from 1984-85 on may be changed to the disadvantage of local authorities. Those authorities will not know that until 1987, with the consequence that the whole of their calculations, not only for 1987-88, but for earlier years, might be adversely affected and ultimately ratepayers might be disadvantaged. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is not his intention to act retrospectively to the disadvantage of local authorities and ratepayers? If he can confirm that, and if it is possible to devise amendments for the Committee stage, will he agree to accept them?

Mr. Ridley: I can confidently confirm that no change whatever is proposed in the way in which past years will be treated for rate grant support settlements. The only point is that they must be based on what is in the Bill about the state of the definition, because hitherto the definition on which they were based was illegal. The Bill merely confirms the definition on which previous rate support grant settlements have been struck.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ridley: I am replying to the point raised by my hon. Friend. Let me make it clear that the only effect of the Bill is that we will not be able to present to the House those final and other statements for the years in question until the Bill becomes an Act.

Dr. Cunningham: What the Secretary of State says cannot be true. There are retrospective provisions in the Bill. He must recognise that and must know that the Bill gives powers enabling him to invalidate decisions which may have been taken by local authorities and which may have been confirmed by the auditors. What he says about there being no retrospection is not true.

Mr. Ridley: I do not accept that for one moment. No change whatever is proposed to the way in which total expenditure definitions are calculated. We would not have paid grant on the devices that I have explained to the House. Despite what an auditor may have said, if we understood exactly what the local authorities were doing.

we would not have paid grant on those claims. Therefore, there is no change whatever, because we will not pay grant on them under the Act.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): The Secretary of State says that there will be no retrospective change. Will he confirm that he has already told Birmingham city council that it will lose £8 million because the Bill will change the basis on which the grant was calculated in previous years?

Mr. Ridley: No, that is not right. If I understand the matter correctly—and I think I do, but I want to put in a caveat in case we do not have the whole picture—Birmingham council moved a sum of money which it did not have into a special fund, and at a later stage it moved that money back into the rate fund, thereby claiming grant. Even the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is not quite right, because it is taking money from other authorities by reducing the grant which those other authorities would have received. If that is what happened in Birmingham, clearly it would not have been acceptable to the Government and the practice would not have resulted in my Department paying grant to Birmingham. The effect of the Bill will be to leave Birmingham in exactly the same position.

I shall now turn to rate and precept limitation. Because of the need to pass the Bill, we are unable to proceed with rate and precept limitation to the normal Rates Act timetable. The Bill therefore provides for rate and precept limits for designated authorities to be determined in accordance with a formula for each class of authority. The formulae contain broadly the same factors as are necessary to calculate rate and precept limits under normal procedures and reflect, as far as is possible, the decisions which we would have taken under those procedures.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State is dealing with the important matters of rate limitation and expenditure limits. Expenditure limits were set in July and some councils sought redeterminations. The results would normally have been announced in December and would have been based on the merits of individual cases. Because of the fiasco that the Government have created for themselves, and presumably to avoid charges of hybridity, it now appears that the Secretary of State is proposing to treat local authority cases not on their individual merits, but by class. That is grotesquely unfair, especially to boroughs such as Newham. Will he confirm that paragraph 3(2) of schedule 2 would enable him to set new expenditure limits before the Bill is passed and thus give authorities much fairer treatment?

Mr. Ridley: I do not have the time, in response to an intervention, to study the portion of the Bill that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. We listened to all those authorities which applied for redetermination and took account of what they said. About half the local authorities applied and the result of those representations is accurately, although not totally accurately, reflected in the schedule showing the formula which we decided would cover the case. The alternative of allowing the Bill to become law and then go through the rest of the rate limitation procedure under the Rates Act would have taken us well past midsummer before the last rates limitation could be effected. That would have been intolerable for the authorities because they would have had no certainty at all.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*—

Mr. Ridley: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but that will be the last time that I do so, as I must allow other hon. Members to join the debate.

Mr. Banks: The three hon. Members representing Newham constituencies went to see the Minister to support the council's case for redetermination. Is the Secretary of State saying that the Bill incorporates our individual application for redetermination? Frankly, that is not the case. Authorities are treated in terms of a class. Even boroughs which did not apply for redetermination have been given a 2 per cent. increase in their expenditure levels. Therefore, they have been treated as a class and not individually. However courteous the Minister's treatment of us, we wasted our time in seeing him.

Mr. Ridley: If a borough or a district does not wish to increase its rates by the amount allowed for in the Bill, it does not have to do so. Some authorities which did not apply for redetermination have been given a 2 per cent. increase. They can leave their rate 2 per cent. lower than the level in the Bill.

Newham has the highest rates of any London borough. Its 1986-87 budget was 18 per cent. over GRE and is 15 per cent. up on the 1985-86 budget. Therefore, it is the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, not the Government, who have a case to answer.

In setting the formulae, we took into account all the information that we had about designated authorities, including in particular that from redetermination applications and the meetings about them.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I hope to make a statement tomorrow about rate support grant for 1987-88. My colleagues and I will then inform authorities of the rate and precept limits for each authority that will result from the formulae. Authorities will, therefore, be fully aware of these when they come to issue precepts and set rates—even if the Bill is not yet enacted.

Clause 6 validates past decisions and actions on rate and precept limitation. Clauses 7 and 8 and schedule 2 set out the formulae which will produce the rate and precept limits and provide for the implementation of those limits. In particular, clause 8 provides that where an authority has fixed a rate or precept higher than its limit before the passing of the Act, it becomes invalid thereafter and it should substitute a lower one. Under the normal Rates Act procedures, rates and precepts fixed above the limits set by the Secretary of State are similarly invalid.

This legislation is urgent to enable the House to complete the rate support grant settlement for 1987-88 and to make outstanding supplementary reports from previous years and to complete the 1987-88 round of rate limitation. It is essential that we put matters right as fast as possible to end uncertainty about grant entitlements for 1987-88 and allow authorities to plan their budgets and rates. That is why we are asking Parliament to consider this legislation on an urgent timetable.

Supplementary provisions in clauses 10 and 11 will allow myself and the Secretary of State for Wales to announce our intentions for the 1987-88 rate support grant settlement, and certain earlier supplementary reports, which can be laid before Parliament immediately on Royal Assent. The purpose here is to give authorities the maximum certainty in setting their budgets and rates over the next two months. My right hon. Friend the Secretary

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of State for Wales announced his intentions before Christmas. As I have said, I hope to announce mine tomorrow.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will reply to the debate. Part II deals with a considerably more limited difficulty in Scotland. Clause 14 validates past actions of the Secretary of State for Scotland in relation to the imposition of grant penalties. It allows him to continue for the future to take into account movements between the general fund and any special fund or account, in the process of estimating a local authority's expenditure for the purpose of imposing grant penalties. Clause 15 provides that, for the future, the Secretary of State may similarly take account of movements between the general rate fund and any special fund or account, in taking decisions about selective action against any authority.

To conclude, the principal effect of the Bill is to validate my Department's and the Welsh Office's practice in calculating relevant and total expenditure over the past six years. It confirms that practice for the future. This is a long-standing, well-established practice for which local government has consistently argued. In the light of the legal advice, the Government had no option but to legislate.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.15 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): We have heard an uncertain speech from a Secretary of State who is on uncertain ground. I advise him at the outset that if the purpose of today's debate was simply and solely to clarify a point of law, to make the de jure situation accord with the de facto practice since 1981, and for no other purpose, we could complete discussion of the Bill quickly.

No one is opposed to placing the distribution of rate support grant on a proper legal footing. Although we do not like Government policy or the way that the grant is manipulated, we would have agreed to a Bill that intended simply to clarify the law. No such claims can be made for the complex, controversial, centralising and retrospective provisions encompassed by the 17 clauses and four schedules of the Bill.

It is a collection of bad ideas to which we are almost wholly opposed. Even a cursory examination of it exposes the Secretary of State's misleading claims. As the debate has already shown, the legislation contains proposals for even more authoritarian, central powers for Ministers, the denial of any justice—let alone natural justice—to some local authorities. It contains proposals by the Secretary of State to try to set himself above the law, to protect himself from the normal processes of the courts and to deny the basic right of any legal challenge to his arbitrary decisions, which will also be above parliamentary scrutiny and control.

The proposals are draconian, even for this most authoritarian of Governments. No legislature should afford such proposals to any Minister in these circumstances. The Government have brought this fiasco upon themselves and upon local government, against all the evidence and against all the advice of friends and opponents in the House and in the local authorities. The Government have made change after change in local government finance and heaped Act upon Act. Since coming to office they have made 12 major changes in local government finance, mixing malice towards local democracy with ignorance of local government finance, and overlaying all with the stupefying legislative and political incompetence about which we have just heard. On each occasion, in every debate and during every Committee stage, a long line of Secretaries of State and Ministers of State have claimed, "This legislation will simplify the situation," and "This legislation is necessary to clarify the law." Incidentally, the system has been condemned by *The Economist*, the Audit Commission, the Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) began all this at the Tory party conference as long ago as 1979. As there is some sensitivity on Tory Benches about quotations at present, I have brought the text with me in case any hon. Member wishes to challenge it. The right hon. Member for Henley said:

> "We shall, in Government department after department, reduce and eliminate many of the controls that currently link Britain's cities to Whitehall departments . . . We are now starting to tackle not only the capriciousness but the quite ludicrous complexity of the system."

I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has a conscience or, given his experiences under the Government, whether he will vote Conservative in the next election? He organised all this nonsense, but a few months ago the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Planning told the House, as yet another reckless Bill went through:

> "This Bill is necessary to provide local authorities with certainty about their present and past grant entitlements." —[*Official Report*, 23 June 1986; Vol. 100, c. 82.]

The same Minister also said:

> "We are about to pass a Bill which will clarify the law." —[*Official Report*, 21 July 1986; Vol. 102, c. 150-1.]

That Bill received Royal Assent only on 21 October 1986. That gives us one of several clues as to why the Secretary of State deliberately delayed his announcement about this fiasco.

In December, the Secretary of State told the House that he learnt of this matter in late October. Although he refused to be specific, he has now admitted that he has known about it since September last year. If he is worried about the delay in the payment of rate support grant to every local authority, why has he allowed four months to elapse before coming to the House with proposals to rectify the matter? That is reprehensible enough. He knew of the problems a long time ago, but he kept quiet because he wanted to avoid the humiliation of confessing that even more legislation was necessary, even before the previous Bill was on the statute book.

The Secretary of State had other reasons for delaying —even more devious reasons than that. He announced his provisional proposals for next year's rate support grant in July 1986. He expressed his intention to make his final statement in November, but suddenly, and unusually, in October, when Parliament was not even sitting, he issued a second consultation document on which he said he would make final decisions within weeks. What had changed, we wondered? Within weeks, we had an unprecedented third consultation paper on local authority grant, which was greeted with incredulity inside and outside Parliament. We now know that the Secretary of

State was fiddling the figures to buy off his Tory Back-Bench critics from the shires and from southern England —another example of the transfer of resources from the north to the south, regardless of need.

The Secretary of State has been forced by Tory party pressure to make a humiliating climbdown on his original grant proposals. He was forced to make those changes despite the damaging consequences of the further withdrawal of funds from many communities in the midlands and the north of England and from some inner-city areas. His grovelling surrender—that is what it is—contrasts starkly with his words on the original decision in July, about which he wrote last August to all Tory councillors. In case he is a bit sensitive about the quotation, I have his letter here. He said this about his first proposals:

"I recognise the strong feelings over the rate support grant for 1986-87. There is no point in going back over that, and it seems more sensible now to look forward to next year. The settlement I announced last month is realistic . . . All of us must make sure we claim the credit for it."

That is what he said to every Tory councillor in August, but he subsequently made two changes to his proposals. I wonder what he is claiming credit for now.

The delay in bringing the measure before the House owes nothing to attempts to clarify the law. It owes everything to the mixture of political ineptitude, fiddling and chicanery that I have just described.

The Secretary of State has tried to absolve himself of any responsibility for the legislative shambles that the Government have created, but he has supported every bit of it, been in the Cabinet which approved it and, in the letter that I mentioned, boasted about it. He claimed in that letter of August 1986:

"I have been closely if not directly involved with all the issues I now deal with."

He cannot escape his massive responsibility for the present state of affairs and the inexcusable delays of his own making.

The Secretary of State could have told the House about this during the debate on the loyal Address. He could have been candid on 3 December in answer to a private notice question which I forced him to answer. If he had acted openly and expeditiously, a short Bill could have already gone through the House to put the matter right. When the right hon. Gentleman finally confessed to the shambles on 16 December, he probably reflected on the words of Ecclesiastes:

"He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

It was indeed a sorry performance. He implied that the law was an ass, but his performance has been a mixture between Mr. Bumble and Bottom the weaver. It is not a Midsummer Night's Dream, more like a midwinter nightmare — I am tempted to say, to paraphrase "A Midsummer Night's Dream," an ass with a hole in it, as some Americans might say less politely.

On 16 December, the Secretary of State not only told the House that he was the only person who was certain what the law is, but he ensured that his officials wrote that day to local authorities to tell them of his certainty. Unfortunately, they had to write on 18 December correcting his view yet again.

The Labour party is opposed to many of the detailed provisions of this highly technical, legal and financially complicated Bill. We oppose the sweeping new powers proposed by the Secretary of State. We question the concept of "proper practice". We oppose the legal immunity that it affords Ministers. We oppose its retrospective penalties on councils. We oppose its effects on rate limited authorities.

Clause 2 talks of "proper practices" in connection with local government rate fund revenue account matters, but offers no definition of them. In finance law, auditors are already under a duty to ensure that councils use proper practices in their accounts. The new proposals need detailed explanation and examination of their effects on the rate support grant system. The de facto position that transfers of cash from the rate fund revenue account to other accounts or special funds were expenditure and that transfers from such special funds back to the account were income was undermined by the legal advice received by the Secretary of State. In his statement of 16 December, he made it clear that the de jure position was that transfers of cash from the account to other accounts were not expenditure and that, consequently, transfers of cash from such other accounts back to the account were not income, could not be regarded as reducing the expenditure of the council and, therefore, could not be helpful in due course in increasing the block grant which that council received. He now claims that the Bill is only an attempt to make the de jure position accord with the de facto practice since 1981. On the face of it, that appears to be helpful to local authorities. The Bill would allow them to continue accountancy practices which have been helpful to them in maximising their entitlement to block grant.

However, that is not necessarily the case. Under clause 2(4), the Secretary of State is given sweeping powers to specify any income to the account as income that can be disregarded as revenue. Instead, such income could, if the Secretary of State deemed or specified it, be treated as a capital receipt or as having a prescribed expenditure portion. In practical terms, therefore, income from leaseback or from some other scheme, now treated as revenue income to a council and thus reducing its expenditure and potentially increasing its grant, could be deemed to be capital income or could be disregarded altogether for block grant purposes. Those are additional wide-ranging powers for the Secretary of State.

Many points arise on this. The Bill appears to be intended to catch councils that attempt to bridge substantial budget gaps by those means. There is no parliamentary restraint on the Secretary of State's discretion to act under the clause. He need not lay an order under the positive or the negative procedures. He may act without parliamentary scrutiny and simply by letter to local authorities. Is that the sort of power that he is asking the House to give him, unscrutinised and unfettered? We respectfully decline.

It is also not clear whether internal transfers of cash from account to account are caught by the procedures specified in clause 2(4). It is clear that transfers of cash from an external source to the account are caught in this way, if the Secretary of State says that they are. He simply has to say so. The Bill is drafted by reference to the word "expenditure" without any definition of what expenditure is. It will therefore be open to any authority to challenge the Secretary of State, regardless of the enactment of the Bill. Clause 5 applies these new rules to the financial years 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87. For all of those years, supplementary rate support grant reports are still to be made. How can the Secretary of State claim that the Bill

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will not affect decisions that have already been taken? How can he say that it will have no retrospective impact? He cannot possibly know but, in reality, it probably will.

Clause 5 will have effect

"as regards anything falling to be done after (but not as regards anything done before) the passing of this Act."

That is what the Bill says. The power to specify items of expenditure for inclusion or exclusion in the expenditure definitions is applied retrospectively to the intermediate years by clause 9. Clause 10 envisages specifications being part of the rate support grant report or supplementary report for the year in question, but the Bill does not make that obligatory.

As the rate support grant for the intermediate years is not yet closed, it is open to the Secretary of State, in future supplementary reports, to use his power of specification to exclude from the expenditure definitions items of expenditure of which he may disapprove, such as fund contributions which he believes brought certain authorities into deficit for certain years, even if the cause or link cannot be established.

Clauses 4 and 6 have virtually identical provisions in respect of the role of the courts, as they

"shall have effect notwithstanding any decision of the court (whether before or after the passing of this Act) purporting to have a contrary effect."

The Secretary of State is there trying to safeguard himself from legal challenges to his arbitrary decisions by local authorities which disagree with him. He is trying to put himself above the law. He is trying to give himself special protection from action in the courts. This extraordinary provision is designed to prevent litigation by any local authority against the Secretary of State's determination of block grant levels to authorities from 1981 to 1986 inclusive. He is asking the House to give him five years of immunity.

Mr. Tony Banks: As my hon. Friend quite clearly understands the technical effects of the Bill better than does the Secretary of State, can he tell me what would be the position under clause 6(4) of Greenwich and the judicial review of the rate support grant settlement for 1986-87?

Dr. Cunningham: I understand that the provision would prevent Greenwich, or any other local authority, from proceeding with a challenge against the Secretary of State which is before or about to come before the courts.

Clause 6 prevents litigation by any local authority against the Secretary of State in respect of his designation of an authority under part I of the Rates Act 1984 in the financial years 1985-87, and in respect of any determination or notification of rate limits and maximum expenditure levels to an authority for the financial year 1987-88.

Having pursued a policy that has been found to be illegal, the Secretary of State is seeking to abolish the right of local authorities to appeal to him through the redetermination procedure, abolishing the effective right of appeal against his decisions that is possible through parliamentary debate on, and voting on, the annual rate limitation orders, and abolishing by ministerial diktat any right of access to the courts in respect of his policies on block grant and rate capping, covering a period of seven financial years. It is quite stupefying that any Minister should try to give himself this much legal immunity. The Secretary of State is quite simply trying to set himself above the House of Commons and the courts. It is a quite new twist to the idea of Crown immunity.

When the Rates Act 1984 was before Parliament, many promises were made by the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin) and by the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) about time for consultation. Those promises were even written into the Act. The Government's intentions to abide by those promises were confirmed by the then Secretary of State in an exchange of letters with me in January and February 1985. I shall dispose of the civilities at the beginning, but this is what he wrote:

"Since rate limits were proposed, it has been for each authority to assess its proposed limit in the light of its particular circumstances, and to put forward any proposals which it might wish to suggest by way of alternative limits. I have made clear that I am fully prepared to give details of how I arrived at my proposed limits in the context of negotiations with authorities on possible alternative limits. My clear legal advice is that this is a reasonable approach."

In a subsequent letter, dated 22 February, the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford wrote:

"I have always made it clear that if authorities were willing to enter frankly and honestly into discussion of their rate limits—as the Act provides—I would be more than happy for there to be a full exchange of information."

The present Secretary of State is cynically casting aside those promises to Parliament and to every local authority in the country.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend has expressed succinctly a most serious state of affairs with regard to the powers of Parliament against the prerogative of the Crown. Apart from reneging on the assurances that were given in the correspondence that my hon. Friend has just quoted, does he agree that, in the Bill, the Secretary of State is seeking powers retrospectively in respect of legislation with which otherwise the courts would have dealt concerning the past four or five financial years and that he is also blocking appeal to the courts in the future, which would otherwise have been posssible under present legislation?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes. That is exactly my understanding of the Bill.

Mr. Spearing: Disgraceful.

Dr. Cunningham: The kind of problems that I have referred to——

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman should read the Bill again.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State says that I should read it again, but he gave all the indications that he has not read it once. In the Bill, the promises that I have mentioned and the assurances to the House and to local authorities have been cynically cast aside. This is contemptible behaviour, even by the standards that are as low as those of the Government. It demonstrates yet again how empty and valueless promises from Ministers at the Dispatch Box really are. They are worthless.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): During his telling speech, the hon. Gentleman seems to have overlooked what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier. It was the sleight of hand, or almost three-card trick, exercised by certain local authorities which led to an examination of the practice being pursued between local and central Government which, in turn, led

to the discovery that the law needed to be put right. Those practices, which deprived other local authorities of some £38 million, are something which all hon. Members would want brought to an end, and it requires certain, precise and definite legislation and powers for the Secretary of State to ensure that such trickery cannot take place.

Dr. Cunningham: If that were the case, I would support his view. If it were a piece of chicanery or political skullduggery, or a deception that was at point, I would agree with him. If it were a simple matter of correcting the law to prevent that kind of eventuality in the future, I would agree with that too. I have already made it clear that if that was what the Bill was about, we would allow it to go through without let or hindrance. However, that is not what the Bill is about, and that is the burden of my argument.

Indeed, it is not established that what the Secretary of State said was correct or accurate for this reason. Birmingham's auditors — Birmingham is one of the authorities mentioned by implication by the Secretary of State — Price Waterhouse, wrote to the Department of the Environment in May 1986 relating to the account, stating:

"We have considered this issue in some detail and have concluded that the contribution is a lawful charge."

Price Waterhouse is a firm of auditors of high repute in the private sector. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that its reputation, work, and professional conduct is suddenly not acceptable; that it is party to some kind of sleight of hand by local authorities; that it is willing to overlook dishonest practices by local authorities? I do not believe that for one moment. Many of the other accounts at stake in this argument and debate have been verified either by independent auditors or by district auditors. That is the reality of the situation. I do not agree with the premises in the first place. If it were the case, I would agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I do not believe it to be so.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Would it be true to say that the point that my hon. Friend is outlining is the one that has now affected Sheffield, that on 17 December Members of Parliament made representation on redetermination — I say all the Members of Parliament for Sheffield, because one is a Conservative Member, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn). We also went with the acting treasurer for Sheffield who asked the Minister when he would announce the re-determination levels. The Minister said that it would be no later than the second week in January. Yet we come back to the House to find a Bill denying us redetermination.

Dr. Cunningham: I differ slightly with my hon. Friend, because the Bill is not denying redetermination; it is giving it but without taking cognisance of the individual circumstances of each local authority. It is applying a general formula to authorities by class.

Under this legislation, no debates on orders consequent upon the 1984 Act will take place. My hon. Friends will not have the opportunity to raise these matters in the debates, which were promised — indeed, written into the 1984 Act. The rights and safeguards given to rate-limited authorities by that Act are simply removed by the Bill. It is impossible for this House properly to examine the implications of schedule 2 without detailed scrutiny, but they appear to me to be essentially arbitrary decisions. Far from ending uncertainty, this Bill will extend and prolong it because local authorities will not know their final grant entitlement for 1983-1984 until 1988-1989, five years later.

The decision not to validate all past decisions increases uncertainty. At the very least, the retrospective provisions should be dropped and the Rates Act set aside in the coming financial year. Past decisions of councils which have been properly validated and duly certified by auditors, either district auditors or auditors from the private sector, should not be threatened retrospectively. That is a quite shameful act for any Government to embark upon. The question now arises whether councillors can take any lawful decision without the fear that the Government will retrospectively change the rules and move the goal posts. Not surprisingly, local government is rightly opposed to these proposals and contemptuous of the Ministers introducing them. This is bad legislation, guaranteed to sour further the already desperately bad relations between local and central Government. It must be opposed.

5.43 pm

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made great play about the delay between September and December. What he was really saying was that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment should have come to the House without getting legal advice. That is plainly nonsense. He had to go through not one legal process, as I understand it, but three by the time he had finished with my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

It is not the fault of my right hon. Friend that the Bill has to be brought to the House today, and I am glad to have that confirmed by the Association of District Councils, which says:

"No blame should be ascribed for making what is now known to be an error in the definitions of expenditure used for rate support grant purposes . . . In reality, all the relevant matters were fully discussed in the appropriate fora, the Secretary of State took his decisions, and Parliament gave them due consideration."

The reason why we are discussing this measure today is the appalling complexity of the system. When I listened to my right hon. Friend opening the debate this afternoon, and the complicated language he used, I thought how appropriate it was that some of us had been here when the tributes were paid to Lord Stockton. We heard the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) recount a very amusing episode in his relations with the then Prime Minister about the appalling complexity of the wording of Government legislation.

I thought that there were one or two people who understood this legislation, whether they were in the Department or local authority associations, but I now begin to wonder whether anybody fully understands the byzantine complexities into which we have got ourselves.

Not only is the system complex, but it was not designed to be overburdened, as it is, with the level of expenditure that it has to meet. This is the point that we have got to, despite all the discussions that have taken place on this vexed subject of local government finance. Rating is a tax on property, and it is an easy and efficient tax to collect, but when the burdens placed upon it become disproportionately high, particularly in the area of education, it becomes manifestly an unfair tax.

[Mr. W. Benyon]

My concern is that the Government's very laudable concern to remedy one unfair tax has pushed them down the path of the community charge, which is now being debated, for Scotland, which is another unfair tax.

Here again, it is not the tax so much as the burden that it has to shoulder that is important. I wish that we could get some sort of consensus in the country that it is the burden, rather than the method, of raising the revenue that is the important matter.

To me—I do not know whether it is to every hon. Member of the House — it is incontrovertible that everybody should in some measure pay towards the costs of local services, or should contribute in some measure, depending on their income.

What is being proposed now and discussed in Committee in relation to Scotland, is not the way to do it. That tax will be seen to be as unfair as rates. Because the charge will be large due to the burden that it has to bear, it will be a heavy imposition; people will not pay it, and the difficulties of collection will be immense. I do not want to trespass into those realms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know that you would call me to order.

If there were to be a simple poll tax its collection would at least be easy, but that is not what is proposed. I beg the Government, even at this late hour, and bearing in mind all the difficulties that have been described already this afternoon, to have second thoughts on this tax, or, at least, to allow the Scottish experiment time to be proved or not, as the case may be. Nothing could be more disastrous for England than to introduce a new system which would have to be withdrawn because it proved to be unworkable. Nothing could more damage the relationship between central and local government.

I call in aid the Layfield report, which bears rereading after all these years. It was completed after many years of calm, careful discussion——

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I am sorry tc interrupt my hon. Friend in the middle of a sentence, but I should like to add that a glance at our 1983 White Paper would show that we came to similar conclusions about the way in which a poll tax would be unworkable.

Mr. Benyon: I accept what my hon. Friend says. It will be remembered that the Layfield committee's conclusion was that if it were decided that a local income tax was not a runner and that the cost would be too great, the present system would be the best. That is still my view. It is perfectly possible to make rates an acceptable, efficient and modern tax. To achieve that, certain things must be done, and the joy is that they can be done almost immediately, with one particular exception.

First, the burden on local government, which it was not expected to bear initially, must be lessened. Therefore, certain items which are now paid for by local government must be tranferred to the Exchequer. Obviously, after the trouble that we have had over the teachers' dispute, teachers' salaries must be a top candidate for that.

Secondly, as the Layfield report suggested, rateable values must be changed from a rentable value to a capital value. People can understand capital values. They know what their house is worth. They do not know its rentable value.

Mr. Spearing: The amount of money that has to be paid is the same, whichever method is used. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the trouble is that the Government, having contributed 60 per cent. of local government costs, are now contributing 50 per cent.? That is the basic problem to which the Government are not addressing themselves, but that is the problem that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Benyon: I accept that one can argue about the level at which Government grant should be set. However, if one accepts my first point, Government support for local government would increase considerably.

We want a simple system that people understand. People understand what their house is worth, not what it can be let at in the open market, which is the present definition of rateable value.

Thirdly, it is necessary to redefine carefully — this follows the point made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)—the powers of local government in relation to the expenditure that they can undertake. It is no good easing the burden of local government by transferring some of their expenditure to the Exchequer if that can be set at naught by raising extra rates without control.

Fourthly, it is necessary — this is where I support what is being proposed in Scotland — to introduce a uniform business rate and a maximum poundage on other property.

Finally, there should be a simple equalisation factor which everybody can understand and which means that the product of a 1p rate does not fall below a certain figure. Everybody can understand that. With such a system we would not have to talk in the byzantine terms that we have heard today.

With the exception of the revaluation point—I accept all the difficulties that this implies—that system could be introduced immediately. It would be an efficient and cheap system to administer which could be augmented at will with specific grants for urban deprivation and other such matters.

Essentially, in this matter, politics is the art of the possible. We shall not obtain a perfect system, because there is not one. Therefore, let us go for one that makes sense.

5.54 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I want, first, to stress that the Government have not kept faith with the House in line with the Secretary of State's statement on 16 December. When he came to the House to admit that a grave error had been made he specifically said that the Bill that would come — which is before us today — would make no changes in policy. However, the Bill clearly dos make changes in policy. It makes changes in policy which have failed so many times in the past, increasing the powers of the centre against the legitimate and valid powers of local authorities. What is more, it rules out in the coming financial year the consultations that rate-capped authorities had previously been guaranteed under the Rates Act 1984, putting local authorities into a collective rather than an individual situation.

If local authorities — in particular, those local authorities which the Government dislike so much, led by the likes of Councillor Derek Hatton of Liverpool — tried to do what the Government are trying to do in the Bill, the Government's outrage would have been wondrous to behold. The Government are endeavouring

to do by diktat what they cannot do by agreement. That will not work. It has not worked in the past and it will not work in the future.

When the Secretary of State came to the House in December he had to admit in the end that he had first learnt about the legal error in September. Then, on 3 December, at the time of the private notice question of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), he made comments and statements about the rate support grant which he must have known at that time could not be substantiated in the law as he hoped it would become.

If, as the Secretary of State said again today, local authorities wanted this and welcomed the definition that has now proved to be wrong, they can have welcomed it only in the sense that if one is being guillotined one at least welcomes the blade being sharp. There is no other sense in which local government would welcome past legislation. We have yet again an attempt to deal with local authorities in the most unfair way.

On 16 December the Secretary of State was clearly trying to pass the buck. He tried to blame others. I always thought that, whatever else one tried to accuse Conservatives of, they could not be accused of trying to dodge the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, but that is precisely what they have done in this case. It is monstrously unfair to say that they were advised that local authorities wanted this and that therefore the Government accepted it.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) told us that the Government had to wait for proper legal advice before coming to the House in December. Why on earth did they not have proper legal advice from their officials about the proposals which were put before the House previously and which have now been found to be so grievously wrong?

The matter goes back a long way. I wish that the Government would go back to the historic doctrine of ministerial responsibility and not try to shift the blame. The Government are responsible and the Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is particularly responsible. I wish that he would accept that publicity as well.

The error that we face today is not, at heart, the huge sum of money involved. Of course £70 billion is a vast sum of money, but the error that matters to the House is the error of principle. At the end of the day, there is no way in which the powers and the accounting procedures of individual local authorities can be run by legislation.

There are other constitutional objections. Like the rest of the local government legislation since 1980 which greatly increases central power, this legislation is unprecedented. The Bill attempts to give the Secretary of State power to define how local authorities should make up their accounts. He is given a blanket power to include items in or exclude them from local government's accounting system. But local authorities were legitimately seeking to ameliorate what the Government were doing and the Government did not like it.

The Government's second unprecedented action is their attempt to gain protection from future actions in the courts. The Bill says, in effect, "If a court decision seems to be contrary to what is said here, it should be disregarded." The Bill does not seek to put the Government above the law; it seeks to put them above the courts, and that is a more insidious proposal.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I am becoming a little confused about what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He seems to be arguing against uniformity of accounting methods. Is he seriously suggesting that local authorities should have their own methods? That seems to be a bizarre contradiction of his opening remarks.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Gentleman gives himself and his party away. Of course I suggest that within the provisions of the law any local authority, as an individual, corporate, elected body, should be able to present its accounts in ways that it sees fit. Surely we need greater democratic accountability, rather than central dictation.

Conservative Members ought to know that local government has done more to put its house in order than the Government have done to put their house in order. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has codes of practice on local authority accounting and the Controller of Audit at the Audit Commission, Mr. Banham, has said in many reports that local authorities have been better than the Government in their accounting principles and in accounting for finance. It is odd that the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) should seek to defend what his Government are doing in the name of uniformity.

The Government say that they are abolishing the rating system and moving to some kind of poll tax. However, they are doing nothing about the problem of equalisation. We were told during the Second Reading of Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Bill that central Government payments of rate support grant would be replaced in 1989-90 by revenue support grants, the amount of which would be determined by procedures that were broadly similar to those for rate support grant.

When the Government are seeking to change the system by the method set out in the Bill, it is ridiculous for them not to do something about the equalisation system, which would benefit local authorities. The Government have instead gerrymandered the system in favour of Conservative-controlled shire counties. But the needs are not in those areas and the equalisation process should move in the opposition direction.

Like the hon. Member for Copeland, my colleagues and I feel that if the Bill merely sought to rectify a legal error and to make the position what we thought that it was there would be a case for supporting it. However, in response to my intervention the Secretary of State said that there was the hidden threat that if the Bill were not passed in time it would not be possible to make the appropriate rate support grant settlement. It is monstrous and unjust to say to local authorities which are endeavouring to provide services that if the Bill is held up in Parliament there may be no cash for those services.

Under the guise of correcting a legal error, the Government have attempted to slip through other proposals. That is unacceptable. We oppose the retrospective fiddling of grants to 13 councils, including two Conservative-controlled councils, Cambridgeshire, which is controlled by the alliance parties, and a number of urban authorities, including my own in Leeds.

We also oppose the Secretary of State's powers to interfere with local authority accounting and we regret the Government's failure to make any move towards ironing out the injustices of the existing central-local government relationship.

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

Of course we oppose the attempts of some local authorities to avoid bankruptcy by using separate accounting methods. However, those are different from the accounting methods that have been used to ameliorate the effects of the Government's legislation. What is more, those differences have been spotted by district auditors, as we have seen in various cases that have trundled through the courts. There is no doubt that the professional bodies that were set up to control the accounting of local authorities have accepted the legitimacy of accounting methods that have sought to ameliorate the Government's efforts to do injustice to local authorities. It is a bit rich for the Government to criticise local authorities which acted legally to ameliorate the Government's illegal actions. That is a ludicrous and unjust criticsm.

The order of the clauses in the Bill is not straightforward, and the way in which the measure has been presented is not helpful. Putting past practice on a legal footing is uncontroversial, but the Bill includes unacceptable proposals. It decides which items—credits and debits—should be put into local authority revenue accounts and seeks to control what is described as creative accounting. I do not believe that there is justification for the powers given to the Secretary of State in that area.

The Bill mentions the principles which the Secretary of State may apply, but there is no definition of those principles. That is unjust. How can local councillors, who regulate huge budgets and are responsible for massive services, continue to work if they have no idea what principles the Secretary of State might apply to their accounting practices? The Minister who is to reply to the debate must give us more information.

It is unfair that individual local authorities will not now be able to apply for redetermination for 1987-88. That makes the initial injustice of rate capping even greater. Rather than having rates set under formulae in which some categories, including previously rate-capped councils, are affected even more injuriously, we should look for a better formula to deal with the present system. The proposed formulae will affect different categories of local authorities in different ways, according to the services that they carry out. Police authorities may get extra cash.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The Secretary of State's formulae mean that there may be a serious danger to property and life in West Yorkshire, because the resources available to the fire and civil defence authority in West Yorkshire will be reduced.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I applaud the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity in making a point to which he knows I am sympathetic. The situation that he highlights is part of the problem presented by the formulae in the Bill. The authority to which the hon. Gentleman referred is not treated as generously under the multiplier in the schedule as it ought to be if it is to cope effectively with the problems that it faces in running a service on which our security and emergency services depend.

I do not know whether all hon. Members have been able to examine in detail the formulae in schedule 2. I hope that in his reply the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will endeavour to explain them to those of us who have English levels of competence in these matters.

The most amazing thing that I have seen in my three and a half years in the House can be found in schedule 2. There is a large bracket, inside which there is a small bracket. It says:

$$\left(\frac{(EL-(BG+E))\times 100}{RV}\right)+T$$

One might think that that was enough, but one has to turn over the page to find out what T means. Incidentally, I am glad to see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are following me closely. The definition of T is given as

$$\frac{A\times M\times 12}{B}$$

I hope that all that will be explained to us. It is certainly a bizarre way of determining what local government has been doing effectively for centuries. It is ridiculous that a Bill should be introduced to deal with a particular point, and that it should then go beyond that in threatening to deny local authorities the money that they need.

Conservatives are saying that they have got us into this mess and that they can get us out of it only by creating an even greater mess and by imposing yet further restrictions on local authorities. However, the Labour party has no alternative proposals for local government finance that would give me any confidence in its doing any better.

It is appropriate that in today's edition of *The Guardian*, Mr. Ian Aitken makes the very point that I should like to make, in good faith, to Labour Members. He says:

"Mr. Kinnock and his colleagues must act decisively to curb the handful of over-zealous local authorities which are employing left-wing illiberalism to eliminate the illiberalism of the Right. There is no liberty for anyone in replacing one form of political indoctrination for another."

The sad thing is that the actions of some local authorities have been used by the Government as a justification for this sort of measure. I hope that Labour Members will urge the local authorities over which they have some control to avoid giving the Government any further excuse for such action. We say clearly that the Tories have created a complete shambles. They must give local authorities some discretion. The Bill vividly illustrates the impossibility of controlling the vast scale and variety of local government by central Government diktat.

Every piece of legislation on this subject that comes before the House produces a need for more legislation. That will continue, and the Bill will not work any more than the other measures have worked. We must recognise that fact. The Secretary of State may regret what his predecessor commenced in 1979, but he should be big enough to admit it and not try to compound the felony by bringing still more legislation before the House.

Responsibility, in local government just as much as in central Government, comes by increasing democratic accountability and not by external repression. That is the alliance position, and that is why we shall oppose the Bill.

6.13 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I apologise to the Chair, the House and to the two Front Bench spokesmen, as a very long-standing speaking engagement will almost certainly prevent me from being in the Chamber at the end of the debate. However, I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall read his words carefully, as I hope that he will be able to answer at least one of my questions and perhaps comment on my remarks.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must be right to introduce legislation when he discovers, as any Minister could, that the practice of the law is not as was thought when the legislation was enacted. I think that that must be common ground between us. There is obviously some urgency, as we must have some certainty in the settlements for future years, which will be delayed until this legislation has been enacted. I echo what has been said by at least one of my hon. Friends, in that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can scarcely be held to be primarily responsible, given the track record.

To some extent my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) has already raised the query that I have in mind, but I should like to flesh it out. As drafted, clause 5 gives rise to some concern. It seems to allow the Government to amend the rules for the calculation of grant entitlement after the end of a future grant year. I hope that I am wrong, but if I am right, I must say that that is exactly the principle that we encountered in the 1982 Bill—a principle that was then given the quaint title of mid-term holdback — and several of us who served on that Committee succeeded in deleting it. We felt that it was the antithesis of good management for local authorities to be faced, after the end of the year, with something that changed the ground rules. However, I hope that I am wrong. Indeed, I had better keep quiet about those of my hon. Friends who joined me then, as at least one of them is now on the Treasury Bench, and I would not want to embarrass him——

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman paid the price.

Mr. Squire: I am still here. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will satisfy me on that point, as we have a responsibility to let local authorities plan properly.

I have a second confession to make, in that I served on the Committee dealing with the 1980 Bill, just as only one or two other hon. Members who are now in the Chamber did, including the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I should point out that I never voted for block grant either in Committee or in the House, so my conscience is clear. All of seven years ago the drawbacks of block grant seemed fairly clear to me. In the intervening period, there has been little to remove my doubts. My main concern is that I doubt the ability of any Government adequately to be able to measure need in the detail necessary in order not merely to distribute grant but, in effect, to punish and penalise on the basis of those self same statistics. That was my main objection seven years ago, and it remains my main objection. The Bill is the third measure to seek to resolve legal matters arising out of block grant, so one or two of my fears would seem to have borne fruit.

The recent announcement made following representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the distribution of rate support grant serves to highlight how relatively arbitrary distribution can be if it can be amended by simply adjusting a series of multipliers, thus producing a quite different answer. I am not in a position to regret the amended statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made, but it served to emphasise the rather blunt instrument that he is dealing with. In that respect, if in no other, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would agree with me.

It must be something to do with the Christmas air that both I and the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) should find ourselves looking back at the details of the 1980 Act. I happened to find the paper that was submitted in February of that year by all the local authority associations. They pointed out the drawbacks to block grant. Hon. Members will be relieved to know that I do not intend to quote copiously from it, but it is worth summarising the four objectives that the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) sought to achieve via block grant and to assess them in the light of what has been achieved.

The first objective was to introduce a simple, readily understood grant distribution system. The second was to place a limit on the extent to which an authority increasing its expenditure could thereby increase its entitlement to grant. The third objective was to end the system whereby the needs element was distributed solely on the basis of an analysis of past expenditure, and the fourth was to stimulate greater public interest in local government and to reinforce local accountability.

We have taken steps with regard to the second and third objectives, but I do not think that anyone would claim that we have introduced a simple, readily understood grant distribution system after seven years, and I am very unsure about reinforcing local accountability. The local councils raised eight points against those objectives. I shall not go through them, as that would not be fair to those hon. Members who wish to speak, but their first and main objection to block grant is as true today as it was then.

The joint paper from those local authority associations says:

> "Although every effort must be made to devise a new and better system of needs assessment, there is no way in which any"—

that last word is stressed—

> "centrally-operated, formula-based needs assessment could ever be good enough to enable the government to use it to specify what individual authorities ought to be spending. To attempt to do this will actually reduce local accountability and increase centralist control of local affairs".

I submit that the record of the past few years has been precisely that.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) made an interesting interjection when he rightly said that there has been a reduction over the years in the amount of support given to local authorities by central Government. I part company with the hon. Gentleman in only one respect but the difference between us is absolute. If local authorities had a sufficiently dynamic and sizeable enough opportunity to raise finance, it would be right and positively desirable to reduce the amount by which authorities rely on central Government. Those in the Chamber who have been councillors, let alone the chairman of a finance committee—a role in which I found myself—will know that the amount that comes from the centre, as it were, can transform any other figure in the accounts. I am speaking of the majority of authorities that still receive support.

An authority may be a good one in that it follows all the guidelines and is efficient, or it may be the reverse, but in any event the size of the central Government figure will be the single greatest determinant. For that reason I look for something that will reduce Government support to the level at which it balances out needs requirements and resource equalisation. That would be the minimum level of central support. I would wish to see local authorities granted greater accountability for their actions by linking their expenditure much more to the moneys that they are

[Mr. Squire]

able to raise. I realise that in saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am talking about matters that are not related exactly to the Bill.

The relationship between central Government and local government is and has been confused, and the confusion has not lessened in recent years. I recognise that a Government have an absolute right to lay down the legal framework within which the local authorities operate—we must concede that to the Government of the day—but I have always been rather more concerned about the right of government to lay down policy priorities within that relationship. There is a difficulty in the Government of the day laying down policy priorities because of the problems that attach to them being able fully to appreciate the individual priorities of about 400 authorities, and because I want there to be some sense, purpose and meaning behind the principle of individuals standing for election and being elected as members of local authorities. In that sense I wish to see the relationship between local authorities and central Government become much clearer.

I wish also to echo a suggestion which has been made elsewhere on previous occasions. It is scarcely novel, but I wish to put it on record. In any event, it is the first time that I have raised it in the Chamber. I can see advantage in the House having a Committee that is charged with examining central Government and local government relationships in the context of any proposals that appear to effect the constitutional relationship. I should like that proposal to be considered and examined. Relationships have changed in recent years and local authorities are seen now, and far more than in 1979, as the agents of the Government of the day. That must be right in many respects because local authorities are the deliverers of so many services, and it must be right for the Government of the day to be able to require by law that a number of tasks are carried out. There are many other areas, however, that are grey and the net effect of changes over recent years seems to be that the ability of local authorities to determine has been reduced. I am not sure whether that is a good thing. I say that when a Conservative Government are in office. If in some God-forsaken century we have a non-Conservative Government I shall make the same comment, but perhaps in even stronger terms.

Mr. Terry Davis: We shall give the hon. Gentleman a job.

Mr. Squire: I shall still be a Conservative.

The House should be interested in the relationships between local authorities and central Government and between Parliament and local authorities. I want to see these relationships improve, but there are few in local government who believe that in recent years we have seen an improvement. Some councils have acted stupidly and some have had their share of idiotic behaviour, and that should be recognised, but the majority of councils continue to seek in their limited way to undertake the duties and functions for which they were elected. I wish them godspeed in their task.

6.26 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The Secretary of State tried to explain in his opening remarks that the Bill is a validating measure. It has already been said, however, that the Bill goes much further than that. It extends the Secretary of State's powers in a sweeping fashion and undermines the position of the courts when reviewing Ministers' actions. It introduces even more controls on local authorities.

Surely sufficient controls have been placed on local authorities over the years. Since my arrival in the House in 1983 I seem to have spent a great deal of my time listening and speaking in debates on local authorities and much less time listening to and participating in debates on what central Government should do to get out of the present economic mess and reduce unemployment. The Government have imposed restraints on the advertising activities of local authorities and the functions of local authorities and have abolished county councils.

The Government are obsessed with the notion that this place knows better than local authorities, and having spent many years in local government I know that that is not the position. I remain convinced that the members of any party in a local authority can still provide a much better service in a democratic system than can central Government.

The Bill makes it clear that there is no control over the Secretary of State. More control is to be placed on local government while there is to be less control on the Secretary of State. Indeed, there will be no parliamentary restraint on him. When the Bill is enacted, he will not have to lay orders within the terms of this measure and he will be able to act without parliamentary scrutiny. That means that there will be no control. It cannot be said that the Bill will produce greater democracy and accountability.

It is made clear in the Bill that the Secretary of State is seeking to validate past acts and to protect himself. If local authorities had acted in the same illegal way, would they have enjoyed the same charity and understanding as we are expected to extend to the Secretary of State? I do not believe so. In such circumstances local authorities would be described as irresponsible and a threat to democracy and the Government might even suggest that we should abolish them. It appears, however, that the Secretary of State is able blithely to justify his own actions at the expense of local government.

Local councillors do a tremendous job and it must be increasingly difficult for them to motivate themselves to serve local citizens and their authorities when so many constraints are placed upon them. I attended a meeting of Sheffield city council when it debated the Bill last week, and there were expressions of concern from Labour, Conservative and Liberal councillors. Attention was drawn to the damage that is likely to be done to city councils and town councils throughout the country. Sheffield recognises that enormous damage is likely to be caused. The Bill will destroy the present process of financial planning. It will withdraw the right to have the financial circumstances of a city council taken into account. It will deny the constitutional right of judicial review of decisions taken by the Secretary of State. The city council has make it clear to the Minister that it cannot provide the basic acceptable level of services, spelt out to him not only by the city council but the chamber of commerce.

I have a copy of a letter from the Sheffield chamber of commerce to the Minister. The letter is not partisan. It makes it clear that the chamber of commerce understands that

"the Local Government Finance Bill, 1986—published on 18 December 1986—will set aside the previous procedures for rate re-determination laid down in the Rates Act 1984, and would thereby appear to ignore the representations made to you by the Sheffield Chamber delegation".

That delegation was led, of course, by Mr. Stokes, the president. The letter continues:

"If this assumption is correct"—

this is the chamber of commerce asking the Secretary of State—

"please let me know, because I would not like to think that our time had been wasted."

The letter goes on to state:

"An unfortunate by-product of the new Bill is the fact that no formal announcement about the Rate Support Grant Settlement will now be made until later in January, whereas it had previously been anticipated in November 1986. To a Council facing as many budgetary problems as Sheffield, this delay is counterproductive, as it will provide certain elements on the Council with the excuse to do nothing about tackling the deficit which the Council has to meet in 1987/8. Instead of certainty about the size of the cuts, there is now uncertainty, and this is definitely the wrong background for budgetary planning.

As a Chamber, we will continue to press the City Council to budget in a responsible manner, but at the same time, I must register the comment that the Government's present timetable for new legislation has not helped this process at all, and indeed, has been distinctly unhelpful."

That comment does not come from a Labour council or any other party that is opposed to the Conservatives; it comes from the Sheffield chamber of commerce.

Those are the facts. No one could run a business in the way in which the Government expect local authorities to operate. No one can make predictions when, frankly, it is not known, according to the whim of the Secretary of State, when grants are likely to come to pass and what their level is likely to be.

The legislation will affect places such as Sheffield, which is already suffering a tremendous level of redundancies because of the decline in engineering, steel production and matters of that nature. A 15 per cent. cut will mean another 4,200 jobs being lost within the local authority itself. Therefore, it will not help the rate of unemployment and certainly will not help the morale of the city. It will mean further cuts in the education budget in which there are bound to be problems. It is not only the chamber of commerce or the Labour party in Sheffield who are worried about this, but the Conservative opposition who, quite rightly, put up their own budget. Even they found that, despite significant savings and cuts, they could not match the Government's rates demands. The Conservative opposition could not do it, and they accepted the facts.

Amongst our delegation to the Minister to discuss this matter was the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn). He stressed that Sheffield could not cope with the present restraints. That remark was completely ignored, as has already been said. While we debated the issue, the Bill was being printed. That is an insult not only to the delegation but to the city council and the citizens of Sheffield.

I now refer briefly to the likely effect of the legislation on south Yorkshire services. Some of my colleagues also wish to raise issues of this nature. If the Bill as it stands is passed, the current high standards of fire cover and local transport networks in south Yorkshire will certainly be jeopardised. There was a meeting of Sheffield and south Yorkshire Members of Parliament with the officers of the south Yorkshire authorities. We discussed matters relating to transport, fire and the police. One matter that arose and that we believed to be serious was whether the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority could have manning levels that would allow it to spend only £21·2 million, which is more than £1 million less than requested. It could mean that the fire service could not carry out its statutory duties, according to the requirements of the Home Office. I should like the Minister to bear this point in mind. If we limit an authority's finances and it cannot carry out its duties according to Home Office levels, there must be some more hard talking. It does not help when the fire service was refused a meeting with the Minister. To this day, that meeting has not taken place.

Surely the Secretary of State must take into consideration the fact that the fire service is in serious danger of being unable to carry out its statutory duty. It also has the problem of whether it can protect the property and the life and limb of people in south Yorkshire. In my constituency, a retained fire station is likely to close because of financial restraints. Its closure will mean a considerable difference to fire services in the area. It is an area in which there is an old folks' home, a school and high-rise flats. I wish to know whether the Government, and the Secretary of State in particular, have fully considered the possible dangers to life and limb posed by these financial restraints. Has a pure accounting exercise been carried out by the Treasury that the Secretary of State must administer? Lack of cash will mean that the new multi-million pound fire station in Sheffield will not be able to open. What sort of economic sense does that make? Lack of cash will mean redundancies of 30 to 40 firemen in south Yorkshire and no new recruitment. It will also mean the mothballing of the training school and no replacement of any personnel or vehicles.

I wish to refer briefly to the transport system of which south Yorkshire is very proud. It is no longer under the same control since the abolition of the county council. There is no doubt that there will be a further reduction in services in south Yorkshire. Concessionary fares will be threatened. Services such as Saturday shopping services, early morning services and business services will be reduced. It will mean, because Sheffield is rate-capped, that the transport system cannot be subsidised to help people to do their shopping or engage in other activities. It will mean the delay of better rail services, including more frequent local trains and improved services in the Dearne valley. In the final analysis, it will mean that the services of which the city and south Yorkshire are proud will be quite unrecognisable when the final crunch comes and the financial restraints are fully implemented.

This is a bad and dangerous Bill. It is bad because it does not help local democracy. It is dangerous because it will affect life and limb in Sheffield and south Yorkshire. The Bill is disliked by all parties in local Government and by those in private business. The Government have made many mistakes in local government. They should now drop this Bill to avoid another.

6.38 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Since I have been a Member of the House, I have interested myself in matters concerning local government, and local government finance in particular. As I represent the constituency of Basildon and live daily with some of the bizarre activities of the local authority, perhaps it is inevitable that I should interest myself in these matters. Several hon. Members

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have already mentioned the amount of local government legislation that has passed through the House during the past three and a half years. They seem to resent the interference. There is no doubt that the traditional relationship between local authorities and central Government has changed in a regrettable fashion. Unfortunately, a minority of local authorities have refused to accept the result of the 1983 general election. I am sure that several Opposition Members are embarrassed by some of the actions taken by the local authorities to which I refer.

Mr. Tony Banks: Though I do not wish to debate the point that the hon. Gentleman made, does he not agree that the change in the relationship started in 1979 with the election of the Conservative Government, and that since 1979, particularly in relation to finance, in which the hon. Gentleman is so interested, the rate support grant from central Government has fallen each year?

Mr. Amess: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that in my brief speech, I shall take up the specific point about the rate support grant settlement. He highlighted the 1979 election, but he makes my point for me. Over the decades, local councils have accepted the result of general elections because they believe in democracy, so, if the hon. Gentleman is right, it is unfortunate that somehow they resented the result of the 1979 general election and carried that resentment through into disgraceful behaviour in several areas. However, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, we should not digress along that road.

I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) who, like myself, represents a new town, about the complexities of local government finance. He called it byzantine. However, I disagreed with my hon. Friend in his remarks about the community charge and the Bill now going through the House, which concerns the change in the rating system in Scotland. I support the Government on those two issues. I applaud and take my hat off to the Government in that at long last we have a Government who have had the guts and courage to take a firm decision on that matter. Inevitably, the system will be extremely successful throughout the country and very popular.

Since I have been a Member of this honourable House, we have had three Secretaries of State for the Environment. When I listened to each deliver his rate support grant settlement, so complicated were they that I thought what brillant people those men must be. I wonder how many of us humble Back Benchers understand the way in which the rate support grant settlements are calculated or, more importantly, how many of our constituents understand the complexity of those settlements. I hope that the civil servants concerned with those matters understand what they are recommending to their Ministers.

That being said, I have no doubt that the Bill will be helpful for both the Government and the local authorities, in working together on the rate support grant. The greater clarity in definitions of expenditure and income and the specific formulae now used to calculate expenditure of the councils will lead to less ambiguity and hence less conflict in the calculations of the Government and the local authorities. That will also help local authorities to project with greater certainty what the size of their grant will be, so that they can more easily calculate their expenditure for the future.

I was particularly interested in clause 1(4), which requires local authorities to itemise in detail the various things on which they are spending ratepayers' money. It is at this point that I wish to quote briefly from a letter sent just before Christmas from three Labour party supporters to the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords. They say:

"We were life-long Labour voters until we were faced with the almost unbelievable fact that the Labour Party in Haringey has become a cover for the anti-democratic left, who are abusing the education of our children with the apparent aim of undermining our families and democracy. We have been told by Bernie Grant and others that Haringey is only a test case, and that other boroughs are soon to be subjected to similar treatment."

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he is laughing while he is saying those strange things?

Mr. Amess: I am certainly not laughing in the sense that I regard this as being a matter for a joke, but I am simply smiling wryly. Not many hon. Members have addressed their remarks to the detail of the Bill, but they have picked up peripheral points. It will be interesting to see how many hon. Members who follow me address their remarks to subsection (4). It highlights these points, which I fully accept are rather embarrassing to Opposition Members and make them feel a little uncomfortable.

The letter goes on:

"We hear that Hackney, Ealing, Islington and Lambeth already have our problems."

As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government has said, the local authority that serves his area in Brent should be mentioned in that vein. The letter goes on:

"It is of course very difficult to discover precisely what is going on in nursery and primary schools"——

Mr. Leighton: Who was the letter from?

Mr. Amess: The letter continues:

"but we enclose a copy of 'The Play Book for Kids about Sex'".

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) groans. I understand his groaning because, as I said, such matters embarrass Opposition Members and make them feel uncomfortable. But frankly, "The Play Book for Kids about Sex" is extraordinary and any parent would be horrified to think that in 1987 any local authority of any political party was prepared to spend ratepayers' money on the disgraceful contents of that booklet.

Another book written by Rachel Tingle, published by Pickwick Books, goes into great detail, and this shows the amount of money that is spent by certain local authorities that are fascinated by the subject of sex. It has been in existence from time immemorial. I do not know why such matters have to be written about in books for young children and why ratepayers' money has to be spent in that way when all Opposition Members plead for more resources in their local authorities. That is disgraceful and reprehensible. I know that Conservative Members will wish to pay tribute to the Government for what they have done in the Bill. Subsection (4) will require local authorities to list such expenditure in future. Therefore, it will be possible for those matters to be brought to the attention of the public.

I am also pleased to see that there is provision to continue the rate capping of local authorities. It is

important to control their spending, and rate capping, as we have found in my constituency of Basildon, is an effective way of doing so until the community charge system can be implemented. I, for one, look forward to that very much, as do the majority of my constituents.

This is the point that I mentioned to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). We must not forget that many councils do not misuse the ratepayers' money and have kept their spending well under control. One such council is Essex county council. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will be interested in this point. Over the past five years Essex county council has spent less than what was suggested in the Government's projections. However, the rate support grant has steadily decreased, from £148 million in 1983-84 out of a county budget of £464 million, to £110 million for 1987-88 out of a budget of £574 million. Unfortunately, that represents a loss of nearly £40 million and a percentage loss of over 10 per cent. of Essex county council's budget. We in Essex cannot afford that loss. In 1983-84 the rate support grant was 31 per cent. of the budget. In 1987-88 it will not even represent 20 per cent. of that budget. That is a significant and serious loss to the ratepayers of Essex.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I am following the hon. Gentleman's speech with great interest, but I find it difficult to square what he just said about how his county has been penalised with what he said earlier in support of the Bill about the certainty that would come about as a result of its passage through the House. Is he aware that there have been massive turn-abouts and cuts in Government support for Cleveland county which make long-term planning of budgets impossible, apart from causing deprivation?

Mr. Amess: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that valid point. If he allows me to continue a little longer, I shall help him to square those remarks when I reach my specific point.

The rate support grant for Essex has fallen, although the county council has not been an overspending authority. According to the statistics compiled by the Audit Commission, Essex county council has spent 20 per cent. less per person than the average for English counties and it has spent 15 per cent. less per person than the average for similar counties. The English counties' average was £351·91 per person, the average for similar counties, called the family average, was £345·93 per person and Essex county council spent £331·46 per person.

The council has also taken significant cost-effective measures to increase the savings to local ratepayers. Since 1979-80 Essex has consistently made savings — these remarks are addressed primarily to my Front-Bench colleagues—totalling about £75 million. Fuel bills have been cut by £33 million, we have a severe problem of falling school rolls, so the surplus school places have been taken out of use, saving £15 million, cleaning costs have been reduced by £3 million and the school meals service has been rationalised, saving £5 million. Clearly, we have striven to get better value for money.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): As Essex is my native county I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's catalogue with great interest and it confirms what those of us who have lived in Essex have always known—that it is one of the meanest counties on record. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that because of that record of meanness the Conservative vote in the 1985 shire county elections sunk to a historic low?

Mr. Amess: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that point, although I am beginning to regret making these remarks because I am probably helping him with his speeches in Committee. I am probably saving him having his researchers find up-to-date facts about Essex county council. I regret that the Conservative party lost control of the council and the ratepayers of Essex now regret the hung council. If ever there was proof that a hung Parliament and hung councils are disastrous, it is in Essex. I invite hon. Members to come to Essex to find out how it does not work. I thank the hon. Gentleman for helping me make that point.

Despite the fact that the cost of many programmes that must be funded by the council is increasing faster than the rate of inflation, for example, because of the expanding need for care of the elderly and larger police forces to combat crime, the council's projected spending remains at or below the rate of inflation and well within the limits of Government expectations. If the rate support grant is reduced, it will leave a deficit of £28 million and Essex county council will have no alternative but to increase the rates by a considerable sum.

Just as local authorities which overspend and misuse their funds should be penalised, so local authorities which stay well within the guidelines should be rewarded. I emphasise that point to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. Essex county council is such an authority and its grant should not be reduced this year from the previous figure. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will reconsider Essex county council's rate support settlement to correct that obvious injustice.

I support the Bill in the hope that the subject will become better understood and that Essex county council's rate support grant will not only become more comprehensively understood, but, most important, be more acceptable.

6.55 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The lack of support for the Bill from Government Back Benchers is startling. I thought that we might have had support for the Bill from the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), who is a political refugee from Newham, but after his opening sentences his speech was a long paean of complaints about how the Government are ill-treating Essex, like the rest of us, although it has made all the cuts imaginable.

I have been invited to a meeting on 18 February where the chief speaker is to be Mr. John Banham, the new director-general of the Confederation of British Industry. The title of the address is, "Should local government survive?" which is relevant, in view of what is happening, but perhaps a more appropriate title would be, "Does local government still exist?"

Local government has been stifled and throttled by the Government and the Bill is the last straw. The Government are reducing it to a farce and an absurdity. Under the Bill, all power is to be centralised. The Secretary of State is arrogating to himself sweeping, dictatorial powers. The Bill undermines the position of the courts in reviewing Ministers' actions. If that persists it will become increasingly difficult to get people to serve in local

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government because they will be mere puppets or, as the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) said, mere agents, cyphers who are unable to make policies.

The Secretary of State is destroying local democracy, turning it into a sham and undermining local civil leadership. He is taking powers to dictate a council's expenditure, ignoring local authorities' assessments of local needs and plans to meet them. This meddling and intervention from afar is creating an impossible position. Local government is treated little better than a criminal if it seeks to exercise its own choices or to invoke the moral authority of its election. That devalues and poisons the democratic process. What is the point of electing local councillors if they are to be powerless and everything is to be decided by diktat and intervention based on arid, arcane formulae from Whitehall?

Previously, we always had a balance between local and central Government, but that is being disrupted and destroyed, causing great damage to our public life. This is causing bitterness and alienation among people with a lifetime of service to local government. Nowhere is greater damage and havoc being caused than in the London borough of Newham which is being placed on the rack by this Bill.

While the rate support grant proposals of 3 December 1986 gave more money to the wealthy Conservative boroughs, it took £6 million away from Newham. It is certainly true that

"Unto every one that hath shall be given . . . but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

While Newham is wrestling with the gravest problems—the downward spiral of inner-city decay—from which it is desperately trying to escape, the Government are robbing it of millions of pounds. That is their contribution to our plight.

First, the borough is rate-capped, which is supposed to limit the rate burden. Then, the Government impose a multi-million pounds cut in rate support grant, thus putting pressure on the rates. To do both simultaneously causes a financial disaster. Is that what the Minister wants? The Government proposals are crazy and irresponsible. If the Bill goes ahead, I view the future of the borough with foreboding.

There are conditions in Newham which look like a riot waiting to happen. Some of us have sought to ameliorate these conditions, but the Government, through this Bill, are sabotaging those efforts. They are throwing lighted matches on to the tinder. I say to them publicly today that that is highly irresponsible.

The Bill could wipe out the £5 million now being given by the borough to voluntary organisations to alleviate the bleakness of life for many local people. Is that what the Minister wants? That is what will happen. There would also be cuts in basic services such as education, and there would be large-scale sackings. Is that what the Minister wants?

It is frustrating for me, as a constituency Member of Parliament, making appeals in this Chamber for an Adjournment debate — in this House as I did a few weeks ago about homelessness in the borough and deputations to the Minister giving the facts — when Ministers seem blind and deaf to our needs and give no evidence or sign that they care a jot about the welfare of Newham and its people.

What is Newham's position? If Ministers listen to nothing else that I say, I hope that they will listen to this point. I should like to think that the Government are interested in this issue.

Newham's original budget for 1986-87 was £167·161 million. The expenditure was rather more—about £170 million. The forecast level of expenditure for 1987-88 is £194·7 million. That figure would give a standstill budget with a continuation of present policies and commitments. The expenditure level set by the Government is based on a formula set on the original budget for 1985-86. Here is the rub, and I hope that the Minister will listen. The 1985-86 budget is an unrealistic basis for rate capping because it was distorted by special accounting measures. That was accepted by the Minister's Department, and is the reason that he allowed us to come for redetermination.

We met the Minister to discuss redetermination and asked for a redetermined expenditure level of £175 million. The Minister was complimentary—he said that we were polite and courteous and put a reasonable case. I note that the Minister is nodding. However, before we received any reply from the Minister we were overtaken by the new Bill, with an even worse proposed expenditure level of £157·4 million. I ask the Minister to believe me when I say that that puts Newham into a desperate position. To be precise, the proposed expenditure level is £10 million less than this year's budget. It is £18 million less than the amount applied for on redetermination. It is £33 million less than the forecast expenditure level for 1987-88.

Put another way, the new implied expenditure level is 3·6 per cent. above GREA, while the original budget for 1986-87 was 18·4 per cent. above GREA. What the Government are asking for and demanding from Newham is a 15 per cent. cut. I beg the Minister to believe that that is wholly unrealistic. Both the finance director and the chief executive of the London borough of Newham told the Under-Secretary on 19 November last year that that reduction was unachievable, even if the will were there to achieve it. Even to attempt it would mean unnecessary chaos and major diseconomies, as, for example, the cost of redundancy payments.

The Government are imposing a standard formula on all authorities of a certain class. That overrides individual circumstances. It is grossly unfair to have a standard formula for all authorities regardless of their circumstances. Why do the Government come forward with such an idea? The only explanation I have is that the Bill would be hybrid were that not the case. The Minister is nodding. The reason for the outrageous proposal that all authorities should have a 2 per cent. uprating is so that he can remedy his legal position. That is why he must bring something forward quickly.

The Secretary of State said that local authorities could not come to his Department, as they did previously to the Minister of State, because there would not be time. The Government have got themselves into a legal fiasco. To clear it up quickly, as this Bill seeks to do, leaves no time for us to come back to the Government and for them to look into the cases of individual authorities. Therefore, although the Bill is grotesquely unfair and inequitable for the London borough of Newham, it must be the victim and suffer for the incompetence of the Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is making a good case. Does he not share with me the feeling that, when the three Newham Members of

Parliament went to see the Minister to apply for redetermination, we were wasting our time because by then, at the end of November, he must have known that the Bill would come before the House and that there would be a class increase in terms of expenditure limit and, therefore, the particular plea from Newham would be disregarded?

Mr. Leighton: I am driven to that conclusion. I do not like to take a cynical view of our parliamentary processes. I would have liked to think that there was a serious purpose and that the Minister was serious. I do not like to think that he was just stringing us along while he knew all the time that, regardless of what we said, he would not take a blind bit of notice and that the whole thing was to be overtaken by the new Bill. Its appalling formula that he must use to prevent the Bill being hybrid crucifies Newham. That is the only conclusion that I can reach.

One reason why the Bill is unfair is that no allowance is made for the need to restore balances. Because of the need to restore Newham's balances, our expenditure level on that account alone will be reduced by a further £2 million. In particular, as the formula is based on a distorted year, it brings about an unrealistic, absurd and grotesque result.

Is it legitimate or prudent for the Government to place such an imposition on the people of Newham? A table that I gave civil servants to give to the Minister shows that, of the different case examples of the 20 rate-capped authorities, Basildon is 70·5 per cent. above GREA; Thamesdown 62 per cent.; Greenwich 38 per cent.; Camden 35 per cent.; and Newham is right at the very bottom at 1·6 per cent. above GREA. That is ludicrous and outrageous. It is completely crazy and monstrously inequitable.

If the 1985-86 Budget were adjusted to take account of the special accounting in that year and the formula were then applied, Newham would be 10 per cent. above GREA. We would be roughly half-way in this table. The borough could live with that, and something of that nature has to be done. I hope that the Ministers have listened to what I have said and taken it on board. There must be a more reasonable approach and a more rational formula.

One of the worst features of the Bill is that for the first time there is no appeal. We cannot meet Ministers, as we normally do, to ask for redertermination and to ask them to consider cases on their merits. We have heard that this is because they do not have time because of the legal fiasco. The whole thing is to be steamrollered through, regardless of the consequences, without any proper examination of the details of Newham's case. I hope that that aspect will be looked at again in Committee.

By far the best thing, since the Secretary of State has found that he has been acting unlawfully and there is now a hiatus, would be to take the opportunity to abolish rate capping. If it is persisted with, the formula must be amended in such a way as to ensure that justice can be done to authorities such as Newham. This must be a priority in Committee, if Second Reading is given. I shall table amendments to that effect. If such adjustments are not made, I advise the Government that the consequences in Newham will be dire and catastrophic.

7.12 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced his intention to introduce the Bill I felt a sense of deja vu, because just under 12 months ago we had before us another Local Government Finance Bill which was designed to plug loopholes in the operation of block grant and legitimise what had gone before. It is right that we should legislate to confirm action that is past. No useful purpose would be served, and it would not serve the interests of local authorities, by overturning all settlements made under the 1980 Act. Chaos would ensue.

Equally, it is legitimate for the Government to include in the Bill measures to prevent local authorities from cooking the books. We normally refer to this as creative accounting, but that still means cooking the books. There is nothing terribly reprehensible about that. In my days as a London borough leader a certain amount of creative accounting was undertaken. I venture to suggest that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was leader of a London borough there might have been a little shading of the figures, even in the true blue and upright borough of Wandsworth.

When the Government detect that the books have been cooked, either to screw more grant out of central funds or to benefit one authority at the expense of others, there is no reason for the authorities which are caught out to cry foul or for Members of Parliament who represent those constituencies to suggest that there is anything improper in the Government stopping up a loophole. I venture to suggest that Labour Members would not be protesting if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer were introducing a clause into the Finance Bill to stop a tax loophole—some lacuna in tax legislation that had been exploited by those wishing to minimise their tax liabilities. Similarly, it is legitimate when the Government seek to prevent local authorities from increasing their entitlement to grant at the expense of other authorities or the taxpayers.

Mr. Straw: From time to time Finance Ministers announce that from the day of their announcement some particular financial transaction will be unlawful, so the legislation is retrospective to the day of the announcement. However, can the hon. Gentleman think of any occasion when there has been a financial transaction that was lawful at the time, certified as lawful at the time by the accountants, but some years later Parliament has legislated to make that action unlawful?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman will know that the opinion of the auditor on a matter of taxation carries no weight, and even if a tax assessment is accepted and it is subsequently found within six years that some error has been made, that can be overturned. The hon. Gentleman introduced the opinion of the auditor, but that has no relevance to the legitimacy or validity of the action that has been taken.

Mr. Spearing: What the hon. Gentleman is suggesting is more serious. He is suggesting, in the equivalent to his analogy, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could come to the House and introduce a Bill which says that he and not the courts will decide the application of the Finance Bills of the previous three years, and he and not the courts will decide the determination of the Finance Bill for that year and succeeding years. Is that not a reasonable analogy for how the Bill applies to local government?

Mr. Watts: No, it is not. From what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said when he introduced the Bill, the hon. Gentleman's description does not fit what the Bill sets out to do.

Mr. Spearing: That is what is in the Bill, not what the Secretary of State said about it.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman will make his own speech and his own points. I should like to get on with mine.

It is not just this year that legislation has been necessary to stop up loopholes in the block grant mechanism. The Bill is merely the latest evidence of the near total failure of the 1980 Act to provide a sensible, certain and fair basis for distributing rate support grant. In 1982 we had to have a Bill to introduce penalties because the mechanism of the block grant had failed to restrain extravagant authorities from pushing up their expenditure. It had not provided the sharp accountability between authority and ratepayer that the architects of the 1980 Act had intended. Events proved that that did not work either, and so in 1984 we had to introduce rate capping. Both penalties and rate capping have, at best, been a limited success in restraining the excesses of high-spending authorities.

While I am perfectly content and think that it is right for us to legitimise, within the Bill, the settlements that have gone before, I am less happy that we are continuing for the next and ensuing years the continuation of this discredited system of grant distribution. To that extent, I look upon the Bill as a missed legislative opportunity, because it does not address the most serious problems of the rate support mechanism.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has promised that we shall have legislation to abolish domestic rates, to introduce a community charge and to review the grant system, at the latest in the first Session in the new Parliament. I am optimistic, and I like to place emphasis on those words "at the latest" and to harbour some hope that the legislation will come earlier. Unlike my hon. Friend the Minister for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon), I do not have reservations about the community charge or his optimism that the rating system could be adapted to provide us with an acceptable mechanism for raising local government taxation. The day when we carry through a major reform of local government finance cannot come too soon for me.

The urgency about removing the uncertainty relating to previous years' settlements would not allow this Bill to be replaced by the thoroughgoing reform that was foreshadowed in the Green Paper, and it could not be enacted within it. It would be completely unrealistic of me to ask my right hon. Friend to introduce such a reform. However, I remain to be convinced that it would not be possible in the Bill to deal with reform of the grant system. For past years we should thereby legitimise what had happened, but for future years — perhaps not for the financial year 1987-88, but for the financial year 1988-89 and thereafter — there would be a different system for distributing grants.

The block grant mechanism that was introduced by the 1980 Act is fundamentally flawed. For six years, as leader of a London borough, I grappled with the problems that the block grant system imposed and came up against some of its major difficulties. It is based upon a specious sophistication that ultimately fails to provide a sensible assessment of needs or a fair basis for distributing grants. In one year, the calculation of the grant-related expenditure assessment for library services was based upon the square footage of retail floor space. There may be some relationship between shoppers and those who use libraries, but the connection is not so close or obvious as I would expect. That is what I mean by "specious sophistication".

There is also the major flaw of poundage equalisation. If the system worked perfectly and delivered the results that its architects designed it to deliver, the result would still be unfair to ratepayers in areas with high rateable values, such as my county of Berkshire. If all authorities delivered exactly the standard of service envisaged by GREA, and if the rate was therefore levied at the same rate in the pound in every authority, some ratepayers would face bills twice as high as those faced by ratepayers in other parts of the country because of the wide disparities in rateable values, which in no way are reflected in differences in levels of income.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that that has never been the way to compare like with like in different local authorities? A better measure would be the rate paid per head of population or per hereditament. The valuation differs, but a much better equalisation process is to look at what is actually paid.

Mr. Watts: I think that the hon. Gentleman supports my point. Even if the system succeeded in equalising the rate poundage between authorities, which is what it tries to do, the rate bill faced by an individual domestic ratepayer would be twice as high in the Greater London area as in Yorkshire and Humberside. The average domestic rateable value in Yorkshire is 30 per cent. below the national average, while the average domestic rateable value in Greater London is 30 per cent. above the national average. Even if the system achieved what it set out to achieve, the result would be extremely unfair.

The attempt to equalise rate poundage leads to the inexorable transfer of grant away from areas of high rateable value per head, such as my county of Berkshire, and, I suspect, Essex, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) referred in his speech. Because of the way in which the block grant mechanisation works, it has the effect of weakening the accountability of local authorities to their ratepayers. Changes in grant, which have a major effect on the level of any rate increase which has to be levied, may bear no relation whatsoever to the expenditure decisions of a particular authority.

In Slough and in Berkshire we are faced with the conundrum that Berkshire county council, which has consistently spent below its GREA, has lost grant year after year. Under my right hon. Friend's latest proposals, if it spent at GREA in the coming financial year it would be £9 million worse off than if it had spent at GREA in the current financial year, while the borough of Slough has had its rate support grant increased from £1 million to £4·5 million during a period when the Labour-controlled council has trebled the borough's rates. For the minority of my constituents who are ratepayers there is some compensation from the fact that, as the county has lost grant, the borough has gained, but it is only partial compensation, because my Labour-controlled borough council uses the grant to spend more rather than to pass on the benefit to ratepayers in the form of lower rate bills.

There is an urgent need to scrap this completely discredited block grant machanism. It is a leaky old tub that has needed to be patched up so many times that it is now difficult to identify which are the patches and which is part of the original structure. It does not require any further patching; it requires scrapping.

The Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" contains proposals for a new grant system that is designed to help to improve local accountability and to provide a simpler and more stable system to assist local authorities with their financial planning. As other hon. Members have said, this is a matter of considerable importance. The proposal is that there should be two elements of grant—a needs grant, to compensate authorities for the higher costs which some of them face in delivering services, and a standard grant, which would be distributed on a simple per capita basis. I hope that the weighting of the grant distribution will be mainly towards the standard grant.

By and large, the costs of local authority services are related to population. Across a local authority area, such as a county, distribution on a population basis provides a reasonable measure of the need to spend. Whether one has a large number of elderly people, or a large number of children, there are needs to be met through expenditure, albeit by different services. A per capita system meets those needs. Similarly, in the more rural parts of a county, additional costs arise because of sparsity of population, whereas in the more built-up and densely populated urban parts of a county, such as my constituency of Slough, additional costs arise because of the concentration of population. However, if one takes the county as a whole, those factors even out. Probably, therefore, only a small needs element is required to reflect the exceptional additional costs that are borne by some authorities which diverge too far from being a microcosm of the country as a whole. To distribute as much as possible on a per capita basis would be both fairer and more readily understood by the electorate, and it would have the effect of strengthening the accountability of authorities to their electors.

The changes in the grant distribution mechanism could be enacted separately from the legislation that would be needed to scrap domestic rates and introduce a community charge. I do not believe that the two parts of local government finance are inextricably linked. Those who have doubts about the community charge, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, might agree that as a first step this is one way in which it would be possible to move to a different basis for distributing the rate support element. There is a more urgent need for reform in that area than perhaps there is in the wider aspects of local government finance reform, although I remain firmly committed to and firmly support all the Government's proposals.

I should like to see the community charge introduced as soon as possible, because it would strengthen accountability and ensure that every adult living in the area of a local authority would have to contribute to the cost of the services that he uses. It would move us away from the system in which those who demand and use the services can be entirely free of sharing any of the burden of financing them. I shall certainly not be satisfied until my right hon. Friend comes to the House with proposals for a thoroughgoing reform of local government finance. Ratepayers in Berkshire and in other areas adversely affected by the present system should not be burdened one day longer.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): My hon. Friend has unrivalled experience in running a difficult Greater London borough and I should like to put on record my admiration for the way in which he ran that borough for many years. For that reason, it would be interesting to me and to the House to hear his opinion of the way in which the new rating system might affect businesses.

Mr. Watts: Perhaps that is slightly outside the scope of the Bill, but insofar as as I can I shall respond to my hon. Friend. The uniform business rate proposed in the Green Paper will generally be beneficial to business, because it will provide certainty about the level of contribution which businesses will be required to make towards the cost of local authority services. The rate at which that tax can be increased will also be limited through indexation. It will put an end to the anomaly of two identical businesses on opposite sides of the road, one luckily in Wandsworth and the other unhappily in Lambeth, one of which pays two or three times as much as its competitor.

Generally the effect will be beneficial, but during the transition, especially in the south-east, one must expect rateable values to rise as a result of revaluation. There must be some dampening of the effects if an additional substantial burden is not to fall on businesses over a fairly short period. As a long-term reform it will be beneficial and will certainly remove from Labour authorities the opportunity to treat the business ratepayer as a milch cow.

I eagerly look forward to the day when my right hon. Friend comes to the House with his full package of reforms. However, I suspect that that day is still some way off and I urge my hon. Friends to consider whether it would be possible to bring forward the rate support grant element of the reform so that ratepayers in Berkshire and in the areas of some other local authorities, mainly in the home counties, with high rateable values, and which are penalised year after year by this pernicious block grant system, can be relieved of that burden and no longer be subject to this discredited and unfair system.

7.33 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): This Bill says as much about the Government's apparent conception of the functions of Parliament in passing legislation as it does about the web of complications which now form the system of local government finance. The Government appear to hold the view that legislation and the introduction of law is almost entirely about the imposition of the prejudices of Ministers on individuals and organisations, whereas the majority of our people still harbour what the Government may regard as a rather quaint and outdated view, that the law has something to do with justice.

As clear a view as may be found that the Government are more concerned with prejudice and political dogma than with justice can be obtained by an examination of the Government's record in the area of local government in general and local government finance in particular. In the very first point of the Bill, the explanatory and financial memorandum says:

"Relevant expenditure and total expenditure, which are essentially elements of the rate support grant and rate

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limitation systems in England and Wales, have been calculated in a way which conflicts with the legislation concerned."

The Government might have been a little more economical with words because all that means is that the legisation is not in accordance with the law or, to put it another way, it is illegal.

The Government and their supporters have had a lot to say about law breaking in the area of local government finance. The surcharging and disqualification of councillors who were said to have broken the law was greeted by gloating and much amusement by Conservative Members. What crime did the councillors commit? They supported a policy that was designed to delay the setting of a rate in the full knowledge and belief at the time, and having been advised to the effect, that such a course of action was entirely legal. However, judges subsequently decided that their actions had not been entirely legal and they were surcharged and disqualified from office.

Conservative Members added insult to injury by hurling abuse and accusations of disrespect for the law with a venom that only they are capable of harbouring and which has poisoned their minds against our local government system. But what is the attitude of the same Members, the same Government, when some of their own friends are found — not for the first time — to have broken the law? There are no cries of horror now, no pontificating about the sanctity of the law, no statements the law must be obeyed and that no one is above the law. We had no paternalistic reminders that ignorance of the law is no defence.

When councillors were surcharged and disqualified, their defence that they thought that they had been acting legally was dismissed. Yet when a former Secretary of State for the environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) admits in this House:

"I have spent £30 billion of taxpayers' money illegally."—

he is allowed to make a joke of it.

What is the response of this Government of law and order, the self-professed protectors of justice and fair treatment for all? The Secretary of State for the Environment said to the right hon. Member for Henley:

"I thought for a moment that my right hon. Friend was going to offer to pay. I assure him that I would not suggest that for one moment. I do not suggest that we should apportion blame in this matter. There has been a distinction between what people thought the law was and what it is. We can easily put that right".—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1055.]

Of course this Bill is designed to do just that, to legalise what was previously illegal in order to get Tory Ministers off the hook, while for less serious and certainly far less expensive breaches Labour councillors are branded as blatant law breakers.

Mr. Watts: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that the law should remain as it is, which is not as it was thought to be? If he is, does he not accept that he is arguing that every settlement made under the 1980 Act should now be undone? Does he not accept that that would lead to chaos in local authorities because there would be uncertainty not just about the coming year's rate support grant, but about everything that has happened for the last five years?

Mr. Clelland: I am pursuing an argument which outlines the Government's hypocrisy and double standards. Later in my speech I shall tell the hon. Gentleman how the Bill itself will cause considerable chaos in some local authorities.

Far from being a protector of the law, the Tory party manipulates, uses and abuses the law in order to pursue its own narrow political prejudices and as a weapon against its political opponents.

On average, one Act of Parliament during every year of the Government's term of office has concerned the financing of local authorities and each Act has claimed to clarify, improve or otherwise enhance the system.

Although it could be argued with some justification that measures must be taken to shield local authorities against the possible consequences of the Government's illegality during the past few years, this latest Bill only serves to emphasise the way in which local services are being made to pay for increased central Government expenditure and the increased centralisation of power. To justify their actions, the Government make spurious accusations of overspending and profligacy.

However, to put it simply and to deal with the generality rather than with the specific point that was made by the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), what has happened is that whereas in 1979-80, £61 of every £100 of local authorities' relevant expenditure was met by the rate support grant, today only £46·40 of every £100 is provided by the Government. Therefore, to spend the same £100, local people have to contribute £54 in comparison with the £39 that they were expected to contribute in 1979. That is an increase of 35 per cent. in the local contribution without one penny increase in expenditure.

Add to that the effects of inflation, the continuing and increasing demands and the increased expenditure arising from Government legislation, and it is not hard to see why rates have increased while services have suffered, and why the areas with the greatest need have had to suffer the greatest increase in rates to protect services and continue with such improvements as they can. The fact that many of those councils are in the north should come as no surprise, especially given the latest reports on the north-south divide. Only two or three weeks ago, the Prime Minister denied that that divide existed. Of course, we know now that the divide exists and we also know that the Government's policies have aggravated and accentuated it.

The divisions are also evident in local government finance. Indeed, only a few short weeks ago, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced what he called "new guidelines" based on what he said was "more up-to-date information" for the distribution of Exchequer grants to local authorities. His "more up-to-date information" was apparently gleaned following representations from Tory-controlled councils and his "new guidelines" meant losses of about £20 million to the northern regions and a gain to the likes of Surrey, Hampshire and Bedfordshire.

Nowhere in the Bill is there any recognition of the existence of the seriousness of the north-south divide or any sign that the Government intend to do anything other than continue to undermine local government finance and accountability. They undermine local finances by the restrictions and legal entanglements contained in legislation such as is proposed, and by setting limits on expenditure which are based on complete ignorance of the real needs and priorities of an area. They undermine accountability by interfering with the priorities as they are

perceived by locally elected representatives, and by replacing elected bodies with appointed boards and, in too many cases, political sympathisers.

If local government means anything, it means the right of local people to build and develop their communities in their way. The Government have eroded those rights and prevented local communities from raising their finances and deciding their priorities. In so doing, they have transferred power from local people to the Secretary of State for the Environment who now has, as the Bill confirms, dictatorial power to decide the financial fate of local councils and, in consequence, the standards and levels of essential services as well as the employment prospects of thousands of ordinary people in the public and private sectors.

The Bill should be rejected by the House for the ill-conceived, hastily drafted and dictatorial measure that it is, as well as for the very good reason that it threatens even further cuts in jobs and services in many inner-city areas. I am concerned especially about the effect that it will have on the northern region in general, and on Newcastle and Gateshead in particular. Both authorities, despite being recognised as areas deserving special assistance through inner area partnership, are rate-capped by the Government. The expenditure levels that were proposed by the Secretary of State last year were totally inadequate to meet the existing needs and current levels of service let alone to allow any improvement.

The new proposals in the Bill take no account of the real needs of the two councils and, indeed, clearly show that the representations made to the Secretary of State on 24 November 1986 by my hon. Friends the Members for Gateshead, East (Mr. Conlan), for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) and me, together with members and officers of Gateshead council, fell on deaf ears. Of course, it is now clear that even as we faced the right hon. Gentleman across the table in Marsham street, he was fully aware of the proposals to be brought forward in the Bill. Yet he allowed the Gateshead representatives to travel all the way down to his office—at a not inconsiderable cost in money and time—knowing that their journey could achieve nothing. Like the hon. Members who represent Newham constituencies, we wasted our time in seeing the Secretary of State.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has just said. What was the date on which he and his colleagues came down from Gateshead to visit the Secretary of State?

Mr. Clelland: The date was 24 November 1986, two months after the Secretary of State, as he told us this afternoon, was aware of the problems in the legislation.

My hon. Friends and I put the case clearly and forcefully, to the Minister, saying that his proposals would mean a shortfall in excess of £10 million in Gateshead's finances as a result of the special accounting arrangements of the previous year. He accepted that by agreeing to meet us in the first place. However, he has not taken on board one of those points. In the Bill he proposes a formula which will force a reduction in the council's revenue needs of more than 12 per cent. or £12·5 million in 1987-88.

I put it to the Secretary of State—at least I should have done so had he been here to listen—and to the House that there is not an organisation in this country which, having been squeezed to the limit, could make reductions of that magnitude without serious and harmful effects on those who rely on it for services or employment, or both. For those reasons and for others that have been put forward by my right hon. and hon. Friends and others, I urge the House to reject the Bill.

7.46 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I must confess that I gulped when I saw the Bill. On the basis of what the Secretary of State told us on 16 December last year, I expected a modest little Bill which would make lawful the illegal expenditure of £60 billion and put the law back to what we had all previously thought it had been. If that had been the case, we could have had a little bit of fun tonight scoring a few party political points, and then we could all have gone home.

However, the Bill is not like that at all. It is one of the most extraordinary Bills that a Secretary of State has ever attempted to put on the statute book. In bringing it to the House the Secretary of State has shown the sort of regard for the laws of the country that one would expect of a member of the Italian Mafia for the laws of that country.

The Bill is written as though the courts do not exist and as though there is no such thing as the rule of law. At a stroke the Bill wipes out administrative law over an entire area of local government finance. The Bill makes it clear that the Secretary of State sees the laws as a pestilential nuisance to be swept aside by the arrogance of the present Conservative majority. It is based on a philosophy that is deeply and profoundly offensive to the democratic process, and it enshrines in statute the proof that in the late 20th century Conservatism and authoritarianism have become synonymous in this country.

Extraordinarily, the Bill creates a regime in which it is deemed, not only that the Minister knows best, but that he knows everything. He can do what he likes under the Bill and can even say what is, and what is not, expenditure. When the Secretary of State uses a word, he says that it means what he says it means, neither more or less. No matter how stupidly, unfairly, arbitrarily, ridiculously, perversely or viciously he acts, the courts cannot intervene and they cannot review his actions. The courts cannot consider unreasonable behaviour, maladministration, negligence and brazen political chicanery. I cannot remember a Minister coming before the House with such a Bill.

Indeed, the Bill sets out to make a complete ass of the laws of the country. I ask the House to consider the position of the London borough of Hackney in relation to redetermination. Thanks to the Secretary of State, the entire process has been a judicial farce. The London borough of Hackney did not intend to apply for redetermination, but it was taken to the courts by a ratepayer. After a protracted, expensive action, it settled. Queen's counsel then told the council, "You must apply for redetermination because it would be wholly unreasonable for you not to do so." At precisely the moment when Queen's counsel was telling the London borough of Hackney that it should apply for redetermination, and at a time when no law had changed, the Secretary of State for the Environment stood at the Dispatch Box and said that there would be a formula. He said that there would be no such thing as redetermination because it would be unlawful.

How, in a sensible society which believes in the rule of law, can Queen's counsel insist that it would be wholly

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unreasonable not to ask for redetermination while the Secretary of State insists, under the same laws, that it will become unlawful to ask for redetermination? Either we have an insane Minister who should be carried away by the men in white coats, or we have the politics of "Alice in Wonderland." "Off with his head!" "But he does not have a head." "Then he will not mind it coming off, will he?" What sort of politics are we engaging in? The Secretary of State comes to the House and says—he did so today—"All that we are doing is making the law what we thought it was before." In many respects that is manifest nonsense, and it will damage boroughs such as Hackney.

Before we started to debate the Bill, resources were calculated on the basis of expenditure levels, balances and the product of a penny rate. Now all that has been swept aside and resources will be calculated on rateable value. Everyone knows that in a borough such as Hackney rateable value will produce more resources than will the product of a penny rate. That is a major change from which Hackney will suffer.

Clause 4(3) says that the Minister will determine rate support grant on the basis of information given before the latest supplementary report. If more accurate and up-to-date information becomes available, the Minister will ignore it. What an extraordinary state of affairs. If the Minister ignores such new information, the London borough of Hackney could lose about £2 million. In 1984-85 it entered into joint financing arrangements with the district health authority on behalf of the DHSS. Before the latest supplementary report the estimate of disregards was £10·75 million, but now there is more up-to-date information. The outturn of disregards is £12·25 million. Therefore, the poorest borough in Britain faces a potential loss of £2 million because of delays by a Government Department and because of this legislation. It is unbelievable.

I give the analogy of two people taking an examination. The first person writes a brilliant paper in immaculate prose. He spends all his allotted time—three hours—doing that paper. The second person writes a dreadful paper in almost incomprehensible English, but he hands in his paper after three quarters of an hour. The Secretary of State for the Environment says, "I will fail the first person, who did so brilliantly and used immaculate prose, and I shall give a first-class honours degree to the second person, who produced such rubbish written in incomprehensible English, because he handed me his paper first." That is nonsense, and for the Government to allow a local authority to lose millions of pounds on that basis defies comprehension.

On 16 December the Secretary of State made it clear that, in his view, it was unlawful to make a rate fund contribution to a special fund if that led to a deficit on the rate fund. He wrote to some authorities about that, but he did not write to the London borough of Hackney, so it is not concerned with the warnings that he mentioned today. But Hackney has a major problem, and I ask the Minister who will reply to the debate whether he can solve the conundrum created by the Bill.

In 1982-83 the London borough of Hackney set up a special fund. In 1983-84 no contributions were made to that special fund, but a deficit was incurred in that year. If it is unlawful to make a rate fund contribution to a special fund which results in a deficit, is it unlawful to have a special fund which is in credit in a year in which a deficit arises? If it is not unlawful, can the Secretary of State—from my reading of the Bill, I suspect that he can—deem it to have been unlawful? If he can perform that absurd trick, Hackney will lose a further £4 million. Therefore, under a Bill which, apparently, will make no difference to what has gone before, the poorest borough in Britain could suffer a loss of £6 million in rate support grant.

Tomorrow we shall discover by how much the Government will expect Hackney to cut its expenditure. I shall not guess now, but it could be about £15 million. Perhaps the Minister can tell Hackney how it can fulfil the statutory obligations that it is barely fulfilling now because it cannot spend enough money on them.

At the general election the Labour party will be targeting two key Government figures. One will be the chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), especially after his statement, which apparently he denies having made, that no one with a conscience would vote Conservative. The other person will be the Secretary of State for the Environment. Together, they represent the Right-wing loony tendency of the Cabinet. The epigram with which the Secretary of State leaves the House and the country is that no one with a respect for the rule of law could ever again vote Conservative.

7.57 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). He destroyed a potentially good case by exaggeration—a tendency to which he has resorted before. Of course there are problems in Hackney, and no one who knows the borough would deny it, but if he cares about a solution to those problems I hope that he will exhort the local council to pursue more vigorously partnership with the private sector in housing and in jobs. I hope that it will take up more enthusiastically the money that is on offer from the Manpower Services Commission, the youth opportunities programme, and the rest, and that it will examine how the town hall is run to see whether some economies can be made there.

I support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I do so with a twinge of sympathy, because whoever is to blame for the fact that we must have the legislation, it is certainly not him. Indeed, he has borne with fortitude the burden of getting the Bill through the House.

There has been a consensus in the House that if ingenious loopholes have been disovered by a minority of local authorities, which have disadvantaged the remainder, it is perfectly legitimate for any Government to try to stop those loopholes. In response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) conceded that.

There has also been consensus on the legitimacy of clarifying matters if it emerges, as it has, that what we all thought was the case turns out not to be so. I am a vice-president of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and I have received its briefing, which says:

"The Association is anxious that the distribution of Rate Support Grant is put on a proper legal footing."

There is an element of consensus and I shall develop the differences in a moment.

Mr. Tony Banks My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made it quite clear that he did not accept that there had been abuse. The hon. Gentleman must be clear about that. My hon. Friend said that that was what was being said by Conservative Members and that local authorities might well have been able to find loopholes. That is rather different from abuse.

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman reads what I have just said, he will find that I said that there was consensus in that, if ingenious loopholes had been opened up and used by a minority, it is perfectly legitimate for the Government to put that right. I was in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Copeland disagreed with the statement that it was an abuse. I am trying to identify the consensus before demonstrating the differences.

The differences are based on the argument that the Bill goes further than building on the consensus, removing abuses and clarifying the law. The AMA's case goes further, and I should like to consider its objections and those of Opposition Members.

The AMA complains that the Bill is too complex and difficult to follow. I am a non-lawyer and find all legislation complex and, having dealt with some local government legislation, I have to say that it is no exception. All local government legislation on rate support grant is complex. It follows inevitably that when one tries to impose a new interpretation on existing legislation, it will be complex. Although the Bill might be complex, that is not a legitimate reason for hon. Members to vote against it, as invited to do by the AMA.

The next complaint concerns the powers being given to the Secretary of State. The AMA complains that the Bill goes further than it need in that regard. The Bill has to address the Secretary of State's powers to replicate the existing provision. The Bill redefines the Secretary of State's powers in the light of the information to which my right hon. Friend referred. My understanding is that the definition does not tilt the overall balance away from local authorities towards the Secretary of State, which is the charge that has been made. It simply replicates what exists at the moment. I reject that argument against the Bill as well.

The AMA complains about "proper practices" and says in its briefing:

> "It seems unsatisfactory to place so much emphasis in this Bill on 'proper practices', when those practices are not defined."

I understand that the Bill does not define proper practices because the Government do not intend to dictate to local authorities what their accounting practices should be. As much of the criticism of the Government is that they interfere too much, it is a little inconsistent to criticise them for not defining proper practices.

The AMA objects to the legal protection being given to the Secretary of State. The Bill affords protection, but hon. Members have gone slightly too far in their interpretation of what that protection is. The protection applies to the Secretary of State and future decisions of the courts, but only future decisions in respect of decisions by the Secretary of State that have already been taken. It does not give immunity in respect of future decisions. That is a much narrower definition of legal protection than has been given by some hon. Members.

The AMA objects to clause 5, which concerns intermediate areas, and alleges that it could mean grant losses for several local authorities. If some local authorities lose grant, I understand that that is because they have abused the existing conventions. It is only right that the majority of local authorities, which have observed those conventions, should not be penalised as a result of the activities of a minority. If they incur grant losses, I am sure that the decision can be defended.

The AMA's final range of complaints concern rate capping—clauses 7 and 8 and schedule 2. If we are to get a rate from rate-capped authorities by 1 April, the procedures to which they would have been entitled have simply to be compressed. If they were not compressed, the authorities would not be able to fix a rate by the date laid down in law. This is a provision for just this year. In 1988 all the existing procedures will be observed. It is a temporary suspension of some procedures, and entirely necessary if local authorities are to fix a rate by the necessary date.

I am conscious of my responsibilities as a vice-president of the AMA, but I did not find its briefing wholly persuasive and I intend to vote in favour of the Bill.

Several hon. Members have said that if only we had a slightly better system to distribute rate support grant we would not need this rather complex amending legislation. Nobody is more in favour of a simplified rate support grant procedure than I am. I confess that, despite having spent some five years in the Department of the Environment, I never fully grasped the intricacies of RSG. Each time an official tried to explain it to me I found that such grasp as I had was beginning to weaken and I had to invite the official to stop, in case I discovered that I did not understand it at all. I understood the housing aspects of RSG, however, for which I had ministerial responsibility.

There is a dilemma here. If we have a simple system, the chances are that it will not be very fair, and that if we have a fair system, it will be extremely complicated because it has to reflect all the differences in needs and resources of local authorities. Given a choice between simplicity and equity, I plump for equity.

I listened with interest to speeches which commended the new system of a uniform business rate and a community charge. If we do that, we are still left with the problem of how the Government distributes their share of the grant. Community charge simply replaces the domestic rate with another system and does not finance local authorities in their entirety.

I believe that we will be left with a fairly complex RSG system. I voted with enthusiasm for the new system, which is to be introduced in Scotland, but I remain agnostic about its extension to England. I should like to see it up and running in Scotland before I decide whether it is the answer to all the problems associated with funding local government.

The London borough of Ealing is one of the local authorities which is affected by the provision on intermediate years in clause 5. Ealing is not rate-capped this year and many ratepayers hope that it will be rate-capped for 1988, in view of the authority's decision to go ahead with expenditure plans which look like putting the rates up by some 60 per cent.

There is a dilemma between giving local authorities and ratepayers more responsibility and the legitimate reaction that the Government should protect ratepayers from local authority abuses. Rate capping seems to be the right solution in the few cases when authority is abused.

In November I wrote a letter to the leader of the Labour party, who lives in Ealing, pays rates in Ealing and voted

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for Ealing council. I asked him fairly straightforward questions — whether he endorsed Ealing council's decision in five areas. Nearly two months later, I am still awaiting a reply. It is uncomprehensible that the leader of the Labour party, with all the resources available to him, finds it impossible to respond to a letter from another Member of Parliament on a matter as sensitive as this. Whatever influence the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has, I hope that he will use it to persuade his leader to answer that letter. Having said that, I will, with enthusiasm, vote for the Second Reading of the Bill.

8.10 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) showed in his intervention, and as I shall seek to show in a few moments, the hon. Members for Slough (Mr. Watts) and for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) have completely misunderstood the true nature of the Bill.

I do not blame the hon. Gentlemen for any misunderstanding because they have been misled and misinformed by the Secretary of State for the Environment who has misled the House in three important respects—in his statement on 16 December and in his speech today. I do not say that he has misled the House deliberately. Any such allegation would be out of order. However, as I listened to the Secretary of State for the Environment I became increasingly convinced that he does not understand the existing legislation and that he does not understand his proposed legislation. As a result of his misunderstanding, he has misled the House of Commons.

I shall be specific. First, in his statement on 16 December, the Secretary of State for the Environment sought to persuade the House that he is proposing to make a minor change to deal with "a highly technical problem". Those were his very words. He said:

"The Bill will simply seek to return to the legal position that everybody, including all local authorities,"—

I emphasise the words "all local authorities"—

"thought existed. It was the Government who spotted the error, so the credit should go to the Government for having identified a legal weakness and for having sought immediately and honourably to put it right." — [*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1054.]

That statement was not true. The city of Birmingham council had a totally different understanding of the law as it existed before and as it exists now, before this Bill becomes an Act of Parliament. It is now clear that the city of Birmingham council was right, and that is why we have the Bill. The city of Birmingham council understood the law as it was and is, and it was the Secretary of State for the Environment—and quite possibly some other local authorities—who misunderstood the legal position.

The Bill is not intended to return to the legal position as it was understood to be; it is not intended to return to the legal position as it is; it is intended to return to the legal position as the Secretary of State says that it is, and there is a very big difference.

I followed the speech of the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton, with great interest, and I agreed with many of his earlier remarks. The hon. Gentleman used the word "abuse". He used the word in two contexts and tended to confuse its meaning. In the first use of that word, he was referring to those local authorities which had engaged in what he described as abuses in their accounts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) explained at the Dispatch Box today, the city of Birmingham council did not engage in any abuse. It made expenditure which it was entitled to make, and which was regarded as expenditure for the purposes of grants and in line with current law. That is not an abuse.

I must tell the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton that I thought it was common ground between all parties in this House that all individuals, companies and councils are entitled to arrange their affairs according to their own judgment of what is to their advantage under the law as it is at the time of taking those decisions. It is not right to describe those decisions as abuses, and it is not right to legislate retrospectively to change the law. That is one of the points that is wrong with this Bill, and one of the points on which the Secretary of State has misled the House of Commons.

I come to the second point of misinformation. The Secretary of State, in his speech today, said that no change was proposed for previous years, but that is not correct. The Bill will make it possible for the Secretary of State to change the definition of expenditure for previous years, and that is retrospective legislation.

The hon. Member for Slough, who has served on several Standing Committees dealing with Finance Bills, evaded the challenge from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South, who asked him to say on what occasion any Chancellor of the Exchequer, in this Government or in any previous Government, had legislated retrospectively on a tax matter and changed the law as it applied to a decision taken in the past.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said from the Dispatch Box, it is common practice to change the law regarding tax with effect from the time that the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes a statement, but he does not change it retrospectively. If people have succeeded — through what some hon. Members have called ingenuity, but what in truth can be described as a correct understanding of the law—in maximising their income, which every individual or council is entitled to do, then it is wrong to change the law retrospectively to reduce that income. That is what the Government are doing. They are retrospectively invalidating expenditures that were made by some councils; expenditures that were made legally by those authorities as far back as 1983-84. The decisions of those councils have, in many cases, been certified by the Audit Commission and private auditors. The city of Birmingham council had been certified by no less than Price Waterhouse, which wrote to the Department of the Environment and said:

"We have considered this issue in some detail and have concluded that the contribution is a lawful charge."

It cannot be stressed too much that the city of Birmingham council has not acted illegally and has not abused the law. It has acted according to the law as it was at the time of those decisions. Even worse, this Bill does not change the law in that respect; it gives the Secretary of State the right to change the law — to redefine expenditure. The Secretary of State is to be given the power to prescribe that certain items of expenditure will no longer count for grant purposes. He has written to the city of Birmingham council and given notice that he intends to change those definitions affecting the city of Birmingham as far back as 1984-85, and it has been calculated by the city treasurer that that will cost the city of Birmingham £8 million.

I tell my hon. Friends from the borough of Newham, who have spoken with such feeling about the effects of this Bill on their borough, that the city of Birmingham will lose more in absolute and proportionate terms than Newham from this decision. Indeed, I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Tynebridge (Mr. Clelland), who referred to changes in the proposed rate support grant settlement and to the northern region losing £20 million, that the city of Birmingham alone will lose £39 million as a result of the changes that were suggested in the third consultation document.

The third point on which the Secretary of State has misled the House today was when he described this Bill as having the objective of "the maximum certainty" for local authorities. It will not provide certainty for local authorities. The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton said that this Bill does not change the balance between central Government and local government. He is also mistaken and is misleading the House. This Bill changes the balance because it changes the powers of the Secretary of State. It gives the Secretary of State for the Environment the right to decide what is legitimate expenditure for a council to undertake and what expenditure will be taken into account in determining the rate support grant. That means that there will be uncertainty.

I have myself discussed this matter with the city treasurer in Birmingham, and he tells me that he is now totally uncertain about what advice to give a city council, on a non-political basis, about city finances, because he does not know what decisions the Secretary of State will take in the future to redefine what is and what is not legitimate expenditure for the city council. We will not know for five years after 1983-84 what was legitimate expenditure in 1983-84. The decision to refuse to validate all previous decisions up to the date of the Secretary of State's statement to this House on 16 December is deplorable. At the very least all retrospective proposals should be dropped from the Bill and all past decisions which have been certified as correct and legal by auditors should be accepted. How can any local councillor of any party now take a decision on the basis of knowing what the law is and what law will be applied to the decisions that he takes?

I come now to a point that is not in the Bill but which is a direct result of the Bill. As I have already pointed out to the House, the Bill gives the Secretary of State the right to take decisions which he has already told us will cost Birmingham £8 million. That is not the first such decision that we have had from the Secretary of State. Last year, the Secretary of State pushed through the House a Bill which became an Act of Parliament in the autumn and changed the basis of the rate support grant. That decision was taken and the Bill put through the House as a result of the city of Birmingham council going to the court and obtaining a judgment in its favour. The Secretary of State changed the law retrospectively to rob the city of Birmingham council of the legitimate fruits of its success in the court.

The Secretary of State believes that the law should be what he says it is, not what the judges say it is. As I have said before, I do not object to the Secretary of State proposing a change in the law for the future. All Governments are entitled to take that action. But I do object to any Government changing the law retrospectively and robbing a successful claimant of his award in a court of law. That cost the city of Birmingham £7 million.

Then there is the decision, foreshadowed by the third consultation document about the rate support grant, to reduce the rate support grant for Birmingham for the coming year by £39 million. That was the second such decision.

Now we have the third episode in the Secretary of State's vicious vendetta against Birmingham which will cost Birmingham £8 million.

At the very least, it is about time that the Secretary of State started to take legal advice from the solicitors who advise the city of Birmingham council. They have a better idea of the law than his advisers in the Box or in the Department of the Environment in Marsham street. If he came to Birmingham, we could tell him what the law is. But the Secretary of State will not accept what the law is. He prefers to change it retrospectively.

This is a bad Bill and we should all vote against it.

8.22 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I am pleased to rise in support of the Local Government Finance Bill, particularly as I nominated Leicester city council to be rate-capped at the beginning in line with the Rates Act 1984. It was rate-capped and it was a worthy candidate for that.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) talked about abuses. There certainly have been abuses in local government, and that is a sad fact of life. That is why we need to keep changing the rating system, the rate support grant and other matters relating to the rates. Indeed, that is why, in the long term, we must abolish the present rating system and introduce the community charge. The ratepayers have been getting a raw deal and something must be introduced as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, I am particularly worried about the lack of any provision in the Bill for a clawback. A council like Leicester, which is rate capped one year can in the next year legitimately cause the rates to shoot to a new high level in order to claw back what it had hoped to receive in the first year but which it had been denied. That blatantly defeated the Secretary of State's will and I hope that it will be considered again.

Local government finance is complicated. I was present when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his statement to the House on 16 December, when he said that he was the only one who fully understood the matter. I can fully appreciate the problems that exist. However, it is urgent that we should have a full and proper control of rates, once collected. That is where we are going wrong now.

The Bill will legitimise the rate-capping provision of the Rates Act 1984. Therefore, it will guarantee that Leicester was properly rate capped, signed and sealed. In the meantime, we must look at the accountability requirements before setting the rates. The Bill seems to provide no direct rules to ensure that all local authorities present to businesses in the area a proper consultation paper so that the business community can have a real say in deciding the level of rates. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts), I want to see one uniform business rate in the future, but in the meantime that accountability should be introduced into the Bill as soon as possible—I hope, in Committee.

There is no provision in the Bill for value for money. All councils should be fighting for value for money,

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whether in reducing their spendng on energy to provide more money for house repairs and some council house building. Some formula is required for that.

It is important that all local authorities should publish details of some of their nutty schemes. The amount of money that can be spent on any loony scheme should be part of the annual financial report, whether it be the Leicester city council's go gay policy, establishing a lesbian and gay unit, additional creches, twinning with Nicaragua or renaming the Welford road recreation ground the Nelson Mandela park. It is only right that such escapades, which are deeply offensive to my constituents, should be properly priced. Therefore, I welcome the provision for that in clause 1(4). I cannot, as yet, find in the Bill any particular requirements relating to partisan and political public relations, another costing that will need to come under clause 1(4).

It is a fact of life that in Leicester the chief executive's department is growing like Topsy. It is overmanned, overpaid and overspending. The *Leicester Mercury*, in an editorial a few days ago, highlighted the fact that a qualified assistant engineer would be paid about £11,200 a year, while a poverty low-pay officer would receive a minimum salary of £14,000, yet no real qualifications were specified for such a post. It is possible for a local authority to pay more for a political posting than for one which helps the entire community. An engineer would not be tempted at £11,000, while every citizen of Leicester will probably be tempted to become a poverty low-pay officer with a salary of £14,000.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Slough said earlier, steps must be taken in relation to creative accounting and deferred payments. Leicester should have been rate-capped last year — 1985-86 — and it should be rate-capped this year — 1986-87 — but, because of deferred payments and working closely with certain banks, it has got round the law. We want to see proper payments for local government. Certain local government Acts and Bills that have previously been brought before the House should now be legitimised. It is also clear that the rate limitation system can be made to work and can make local authorities sit up and realise that they cannot spend everybody else's money with impunity. Despite the introduction of the rate support grant and the rate limitation system some Labour local authorities have been able to scoot round the provisions and make the ratepayers pay in full the next year. There has been an excessive waste of ratepayers' money.

There is no doubt that there is no real voice for the business community. I appreciate that the Bill does not provide an opportunity for reintroducing the business vote, but that would have been the best way forward. Labour Members always argue that business men already have a vote wherever they live. However, most business men cannot afford to live in Leicester because their rates went up by 80 per cent. this year. Most have moved into the county, where the rates are considerably less. Labour Members may laugh, but those business men are the people who provide the real jobs in Leicester which are desperately required. It is depressing that they should move out into the county because they cannot afford the high rates.

I support the Bill, but I call for guarantees that we shall have value for money in the period up to the general election, for guarantees that once the Scottish dimension has been properly examined we shall get away from the current rating system and ensure that with the community charge there will be a just and equitable means for levying rates on all ratepayers.

It seems that wherever there is a Left-wing council, few people—only about 30 per cent.—pay rates. The rest are funded by the taxpayers. There is not a truly representative voice. High rates kill jobs and deny the opportunities for expansion.

The introduction to part II of the Bill says that it will have no effect on central Government manpower. I only wish that that were true of Leicester city council. The Labour council said that once rate limitation was introduced there would be a tremendous loss of jobs, but all that we have had is a massive increase in the number of jobs provided by the city council. The Bill might offer the council and the chief executive the opportunity to take on even more employees. That would be bad for the city's ratepayers.

The Bill is vital and will ensure that until we do away with the rating system ratepayers will have a voice. I urge Ministers at the Department of the Environment to look again at rate capping and at the needs of Leicester, where local people desperately want to see value for money. The scope of rate limitation should be widened to cover other councils and the district auditors should have more power. Councils have used deferred payments and other methods to get round the law, and action needs to be taken urgently. If we act now, ratepayers will be justified in voting Conservative in the May elections.

8.30 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): The speech of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) was illiterate in terms of comprehending what local government is about and the role that it plays in local economies and in the national economy. It was the hon. Gentleman's usual cloud-seven speech, drifting away into oblivion.

The so-called Left-wing council in Sheffield has been rate-capped under the Rates Act 1984. On 6 November a delegation from the Sheffield chamber of commerce and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) came to London to put to Ministers the case that Sheffield could not manage on the £259 million budget set by the Government.

It has been useful in the past two years to have the involvement of the chamber of commerce and the business community. They have discovered the disastrous situation facing local government finance and have said that it would be impossible to run a business in the manner in which the Government are asking local government to operate. The president of the chamber of commerce told its annual meeting that nobody could run Sheffield city council on the level of expenditure determined by the Government. That view manifested itself in strong representations that there should be a redetermination of the Sheffield budget.

A delegation from the local authority pressed its case on 25 November and on 17 November all Sheffield Members, including the hon. Member for Hallam, who is a Conservative, made representations to the Government. That was the day after the Secretary of State's statement to the House. We were told that the decision on redetermination would be known during the second week

in January, but when we returned after the Christmas recess we found that the redetermination process had been flattened.

A case has been made by industry, commerce and the public representatives of all parties. Even the proposed Conservative amendments to the resolution passed by Sheffield city council called for a cut of only £15 million, compared with the £41 million cut that the Government are imposing.

People from Sheffield have come to London and tried to put the case to the Government. They were invited by the Government to put the case for redetermination, and the community put a lot of effort into making that case. It is deplorable that the Government's only response is to introduce a Bill stopping that sort of discussion.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East spoke about audits, and I remind him of what was said about the so-called Left-wing Sheffield city council. In February 1985 Mr. John Banham, the Controller of Audit at the Audit Commission, told the Institute of Housing conference that Sheffield was "well-managed". He said:

"Other cities could learn from Sheffield which provides outstanding value for money."

That authority has been vindictively attacked by the Government and is one of the most deprived areas in the United Kingdom. I represent the constituency with the highest youth unemployment in the United Kingdom. Our local authority will be denied resources for putting safety valves into the community and relieving some of the hardships. The council faces the impossible task of trying to run the city with a reduction of £41 million in its budget.

Sheffield has a major unemployment problem, particularly among young people, but it also has one of the largest aging populations in the United Kingdom. Those are serious problems, and the community wanted to put them before the Government, but we now face a potential 15 per cent. cut in the number of council employees—about 4,200 jobs. Bearing in mind that the council has responsibilities for some compulsory expenditure on, for example, the courts, cuts in other departments could total about 20 per cent.

The situation is desperate. I hope that the Government will accept what has been said by Labour Members. The Government have been advised to take certain legal manoeuvres to prevent consultations in the future, but I think that they should take further legal advice to find a mechanism to allow such discussions to continue. They should at least seriously consider amendments that will be proposed in Committee.

The north-south divide has been forcibly portrayed in the media over the past two or three weeks. If the Government continue taking resources from the north of England, and particularly from the inner cities, they will wreak havoc.

Much play has been made by Conservative Members of the legal manoeuvrings of local government. That complaint cannot be lodged against the joint boards in the areas of the disbanded metropolitan county councils. They have no reserves, because they are brand-new authorities. They could not have done any creative accountancy, because they were not there last year. There is no fat to lose, because nothing has been put into the coffers. We are talking about new authorities, yet some, like south Yorkshire, face rate capping.

To some extent, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) has mentioned the fire service. When we spoke last Friday to the chief fire officer for south Yorkshire, a black and dismal picture emerged. He is seriously concerned that he cannot meet the statutory obligations that have been laid down by the Home Office. It is all right for advisers and others not to take much notice, but they could be responsible for the deaths of people in south Yorkshire if the emergency services cannot come up to the minimum laid down by the Home Office. It is about time that there was a little more consultation between the Home Office and those who decide the expenditure levels.

During the past 12 months, transport has seen a 225 per cent. increase in fares, with 1,300 redundancies and a 10 per cent. reduction in the number of services. The Government have totally ignored our case for redetermination, and as a result we shall have £9 million less. That will mean a considerable number of redundancies. Moreover, the position on tendering will become very difficult. Indeed, the situation in south Yorkshire is desperate. The Government are creating more poverty. All the evidence shows that the north should be given support, but the Government are operating in the opposite direction and are vindictively starving south Yorkshire and, in particular, Sheffield of resources.

8.41 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): When the Secretary of State made his statement on 16 December, I acted from memory and reminded him that with regard to London Transport, the judge had said that charging Londoners extra millions of pounds was

"illegal, improper and administratively incompetent". — [*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1055.]

The Secretary of State took exception to what I said, and I now wish to make a correction. Mr. Justice McNeill said that the Secretary of State had acted

"unlawfully, irrationally and procedurally improperly in giving a direction". — [*Official Report*, 19 February 1985; Vol. 73, c. 877.]

I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not in the Chamber, as he should attend the debate more. But it is little wonder that any local authority or citizen should put the worst possible interpretation on his actions and on the power that he is grasping for himself. When the Secretary of State made that statement, I said:

"Will he take into account the needs of inner-city areas such as Newham in his means and needs formula?" — [*Official Report*, 16 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. 1056.]

Of course, the Secretary of State did not reply to that.

Newham sent two deputations to the Secretary of State and his Ministers, and we have also heard from colleagues representing Sheffield, Birmingham and the north-east. I suggest that it was deliberately deceitful of the Government to give boroughs that sent deputations the impression that there would be a continuing redetermination at a time when the Bill was already being prepared. Indeed, as has been said, Ministers even saw a deputation the day after the statement had been made. If there had been provision in the Bill for adjusting the formulas in schedule 2, it might have been a different matter. But instead, the Secretary of State will say different things to different authorities at different times in respect of different times in respect of different times in the past and different times in the future. It is like Alice in Wonderland, only I think that she would have said, "I say what I mean and I mean what I say." No Secretary of State, supported

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disreputably by his right hon. and hon. Friends, has ever taken such overwhelming powers in order to overrule the legitimate judgments of the court.

I turn briefly to the determination of the grant and the capping formula in schedule 2. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) made it clear that Newham's standstill budget for the coming financial year would be about £190 million. The total expenditure permitted by the formula will be about £154 million. However, if the proper formula had been used to take account of the exceptional conditions prevailing, a fair figure would have been £167 million: about 10 per cent. over GREA instead of the 1·5 per cent. quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East.

I should like to ask the Secretary of State some questions, and if the Minister cannot answer them, I should like to be given a written reply. As the Minister comes from St. Andrew's house, I do not expect a reply now, although I expect him to be able to answer my sixth question. I should like the Secretary of State's signature to be on that reply. First, are the Government requiring Newham to make a 15 per cent. reduction in its expenditure? We all believe that to be the case. Secondly, if not, what is the figure? Thirdly, is there any greater reduction anywhere, and if so where, and what are the other reductions? I think that I am asking fair questions that should have been covered by the Secretary of State in his speech. Fourthly, were the figures given in the table that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East mentioned, and which is now in the possession of the Secretary of State and his advisers, broadly correct? Fifthly, if the formula was amended to discount the effects of a difference of accounting on the base expenditure, would Newham be eligible for GREA plus 10 per cent., as shown in the manuscript amendments to that table which is in his possession?

I believe that answers to those questions should be given by the end of the week. Members of Parliament and the public in Newham require the Secretary of State to answer in his capacity as a Minister of the Crown and not as a dictator or would-be dictator.

I shall now ask my sixth question, and I hope that the Minister will reply to it. I shall pause in order to allow him to do so, as it is a reasonable question, and he should know the answer. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to amend the formula in Committee to give Newham at least a GREA plus 10 per cent. figure? If the Minister wishes to intervene, I shall give way. If not, that question should be answered in writing as it is capable of a reply now.

There may be a solution to one of our major mysteries. Tonight, speeches have been made by hon. Members representing Essex and Berkshire. Each of them complained that the Government were dealing harshly and unjustly with them despite the harsh economies that they admitted that they had made. What reason can there be for a Conservative Secretary of State to take such steps? I am forced to draw an unwelcome conclusion, which is that the Secretary of State and those around him, including the Prime Minister, are bent on the destruction of local government as we know it in the United Kingdom. They are taking a leaf out of extra-parliamentary political books and are trying to push through a Bill when the House is half empty and the reporting level is not strong. That Bill will bring local government further into disrepute for reasons that it cannot prevent. The usual method of discrediting something that is wholesome is to generalise from the particular to try to persuade others that it is wrong when all the time it is the discreditor who is wrong. I believe that that is what the Secretary of State and his friends are trying to do. I shall say that inside and outside the House until the allegation is denied and some evidence is produced that it is not the truth.

The Bill is more likely to come from a political party of the extreme Right that does not believe in parliamentary democracy than from any other direction. It stems from views that we would expect from a Fascist and not from a Secretary of State who claims to favour parliamentary democracy.

8.50 pm

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): The Bill is vital, because without it we shall be faced with legal and financial chaos. The exaggerated rhetoric that we have heard from Opposition Members is unjustified. We have had to listen too often to speeches about the end of civilisation being nigh. They have claimed so often that the end of local government is nigh. The crying of wolf has gone on for rather a long time and we have ceased to believe them. They have failed to produce any concrete evidence to support their claims.

A number of justified concerns have been expressed this evening, however. Some of them are based on points of principle and some relate to the redetermination process. Surely it has emerged from the debate that there is an urgent need for a more lucid and comprehensible system of allocating resources between local authorities. The system is complex, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has accepted that. In global terms the allocations are understood only by the Almighty and two individuals. The Almighty is not communicating very directly with the Department of the Environment, and perhaps the reason for the lack of communication is the involvement of the Bishop of Durham.

One person who I understand fully comprehends the system is my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend forgot about it the morning after the system was explained to him, and the gentleman who explained it to him and made him understand it is now a raving lunatic wandering around the bowels of Marsham street, and, if not there, in the Scottish Office, muttering that his GREAs and expenditure limits do not equate and, oh lackaday, that his block grant has declined yet again.

It is extremely difficult to understand what is going on and extremely difficult for local authorities to plan the basis of their future expenditure, and that is borne in upon us every time that we debate local government finance. The formulae are too complicated and relate to abstract national data which sometimes can operate quixotically from one authority to another. We need to have formulae that can relate more directly to the needs of individual authorities. Having established a set of formulae, we do not want the rapid changes which have taken place over many years in the allocation of resources. No sooner does a local authority think that it understands how much money it will receive than another factor changes the allocation of resources so that its financial planning is constantly nullified. We need greater stability and the formulae must bear a relationship to the needs of

authorities. Surely it is not beyond the mammoth intellectual might of the Department of the Environment to set up a system that will give us a reasonably equitable base and annually make pro rata changes to that base.

Many references have been made to the way in which the Bill aborts or circumvents the redetermination procedure. Last year, with the establishment of joint boards, there was considerable hassle about the allocation of resources to police, fire and transport authorities. It seemed in the discussions that took place last year and early this year that we were beginning to overcome some of the problems, but everything has been put back into the melting pot. The result is a stream of problems as we consider parochially the allocation of resources.

I do not hold any brief for the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority, which has placed far too much emphasis on political point scoring rather than providing services for the general public of west Yorkshire, but it is not an inefficient wastrel, as some of the other authorities are or have been. Yet I accept that it has had difficulties. Some progress was made with the redetermination of its expenditure limit for this year but the consequence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport agreeing to the redetermination was a loss of block grant, which meant that no financial benefits would be passed on to the ratepayers of west Yorkshire. When we compare the finances of the authority with those of others, we find that the amount of grant as a percentage of its expenditure limit is only 14 per cent. That is the lowest percentage of any passenger transport authority. The grant-related expenditure of Tyne and Wear as a percentage of its expenditure limit is 90 per cent. and in west Yorkshire it is 70 per cent. If we compare the block grant as a percentage of expenditure limit, it is 70 per cent. for Tyne and Wear and only 14 per cent. for west Yorkshire.

There is a series of disparities between passenger transport authorities and it seems that there is neither rhyme nor reason for this when one engages in a comparative exercise that embraces the fire, police and transport authorities in one metropolitan area with those of another. There are passenger transport authorities that have a higher proportion of expenditure covered by block grant than that of west Yorkshire and it is not possible to come to any rationale on which to base the transport services for west Yorkshire.

West Yorkshire has had great difficulty in understanding the present system and in trying to obtain a sensible redetermination. The situation is especially difficult for the West Yorkshire fire authority. Questions have been raised about its efficiency and I have been concerned to ensure that its resources are used as appropriately as possible. Bearing in mind the performance of other authorities and Home Office guidelines, it seems to be a reasonably competent authority, yet we were faced with the possibility this year in one stage of the redetermination procedure of a shortfall of £1·7 million in maintaining services at their current level. The difficulty that arose, when one examined the comparative figures, was that, of all fire bodies, west Yorkshire had the highest rate in the pound and next to the lowest level of total grant. It seems to be nonsense that the grant-related expenditure and the expenditure limit are determined at entirely different levels.

As the redetermination procedure progressed, we hoped that our representations to the various Departments would bear fruit and that we would be able, at the very least, to maintain our services in west Yorkshire at the current level. All of a sudden, just as some sense and coherence are entering the procedure, the Bill seeks to abort the basis of that redetermination application. Therefore, on the basis of the figures in the Bill, we will receive only half of what is required to ensure that current services are maintained. It is nonsense that where a relatively efficient authority, according to Home Office guidelines and a report of the chief inspector of fire services, needs additional resources to improve fire cover throughout west Yorkshire. The redetermination process has been stopped, to the considerable disadvantage of residents of west Yorkshire.

Would it not have been possible, instead of the algebraic formula in schedule 2 that resembles an O-level algebra paper, to enshrine in the Bill some more sensible, individual basis for redetermination? Instead of treating the authorities on a class-by-class basis, the legislation should seek to deal with some of the individual problems, such as those faced by the fire authority in west Yorkshire and the passenger transport authority.

I make two pleas to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in regard to the Bill. First, I plead that he use this opportunity to inject into the Bill a comprehensive, comprehensible, coherent system for 1987-88 that, as far as possible, will relate to the needs of individual authorities. My second plea is for a determined attempt to make sure that the system is more readily understood and simplified, primarily so that ratepayers and authorities may know from year to year on what basis they are to make their calculations.

9.1 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I wish to follow the remarks made by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) about the effects of the Bill on transport and, in particular, on the fire service in south Yorkshire. It is time for the Secretary of State to look again at the problems that will be caused by the Bill. I do not like retrospective legislation. It smacks of Victorian attitudes. I admit that if there is something wrong with the law it must be put right, but it should be put right for the future and not retrospectively just to get somebody off the hook.

After objections were made about the cuts in the South Yorkshire fire service, the Home Office decided that an investigation should be carried out. The result was a minimum requirement for statutory cover.

I spent 12 years in the South Yorkshire fire service as a retained fireman. At the time, one of the things of which we in South Yorkshire were proud was the efficiency of the fire service and the ability of its personnel to turn out and to be at a fire within five minutes for category A and B fires, and within 15 minutes for category C and D fires. We prided ourselves on a three-minute turnout from all retained stations and from all full-time stations. We had a service that was second to none. We also had a highly qualified service. Therefore, we had a proud record. It was a record on which the public could depend.

The Bill seeks to stop the Secretary of State from redetermining the expenditure that has been allocated to the fire service. For the first time, fire cover in that area will be suspect. Thirty of 40 full-time men will probably be made redundant. Some already clapped-out appliances will continue in service. The fire service has not had a new appliance for the past two years. New appliances will

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certainly be needed in future. The old appliances that are being kept in use will need to have more and more money spent on them, to keep them in service. More than that, one has to consider the time when they will be off the road and out of the way.

Machines that should carry six men will carry four. Machines that should should carry four will carry three. Machines that should carry two will carry one. That will happen if the Bill is not altered. Those are not the local politicians' figures: they are the Home Office's figures. They are the statutory figures. One Department is saying what the minimum fire cover should be, yet the Secretary of State is making sure that it cannot be provided. An area is at risk. Two things are essential when a fire takes place. One is the quickness of the response, and the second is the efficiency of the service that responds. The amount of fire damage depends on the response. Every 15 seconds during the three minute turnout time, the damage increases tremendously.

It is no fault of the Government, but in south Yorkshire, ironically, since they came to power, the loss of life caused by fire has doubled. The call-out rate has increased from 10,000 to 15,000 calls per year. That is why I say to the Secretary of State, please look at the situation again, because he is putting that service into disrepute, but more than ever he is putting the people at risk.

9.7 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Dewsbury was absolutely correct when he drew attention to the fact that hardly anyone can honestly claim to understand how local government finance works—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is Halifax."] I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. His constituency is Halifax.

Mr. Galley: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not confusing Dewsbury with Halifax because Halifax is a much more pleasant place than Dewsbury or even Newham.

Mr. Banks: I cannot believe that any place that the hon. Gentleman represents is more pleasant than Newham, but we shall pass quickly over that point.

Wherever he comes from, the hon. Gentleman was right to say that few can honestly claim to understand how local government finance works. Looking at schedule 2, one realises that the Secretary of State can hardly be described as Euclid, but I should be interested to see him try to explain to the House in words that even I can understand the way in which the formula will work, because it is gobbledegook. All that we know is that the impact on the borough of Newham will be horrendous. It is no surprise that the leader of Newham borough council, Councillor Jones, wrote to the Secretary of State and said that if we have to endure the cuts that are determined for us in the Bill, there will be social disruption on the streets of Newham. I cannot believe that even this Secretary of State wants that.

The Bill is grossly unfair. On 16 December the Secretary of State said

"the accepted approach . . . did not . . . correspond to the statute".

When the Secretary of State found that out, he merely brought in retrospective legislation to correct the position. Of course, this Secretary of State has been at odds with statutes before, certainly in the McNeill case. Whereas Secretaries of State can come to the House and inroduce retrospective legislation, when councillors try to do their best to protect jobs and services and find that they are acting in a way that does not correspond to the statute, they find themselves surcharged and driven from office. That is what makes the Bill so grossly unfair, and that is why I am delighted that the Labour Front Bench made it clear that the incoming Labour Government will abolish personal surcharge for local councillors.

If the Secretary of State's euphemism for law breaking was breathtaking, his claim in the same statement that he was

"the only person who is quite certain what the law is" —[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107c. 1051-55.]

was downright absurd. The right hon. Gentleman is the most arrogant and indolent of all Her Majesty's Ministers. He proved that when he came to the Dispatch Box, made a great dash for the post and clearly revealed that he did not understand the legislation to which he was asking the House to agree. He has no idea of what the law was or, indeed, will be, if the Bill is passed. We have already had a list of amendments correcting the mistakes in the Bill and that is even before we have had a chance to discuss it in Committee.

I still feel annoyed and aggrieved that at our meeting with the Minister in November where, as the Secretary of State correctly said, we were courteously received and we exchanged our views courteously, we were wasting our time. The Minister must have known that there was no chance of Newham's particular problems being considered in a particular fashion by the Government because the Bill would treat Newham within a class of local authorities. That means that the undertaki gs given during the Rates Act 1984 are meaningless. Redetermination was supposed to be about going to Ministers, spelling out local difficulties and Ministers making particular settlements. The Minister has still not said that I was misled in believing that our discussion with him was open, honest and genuine and that we stood a chance of reaching a better settlement for Newham than the present one.

The Bill legalises past illegalities and seeks to protect Ministers from future illegalities. It gives those same Ministers unrestricted powers to change the financial rules whenever they want to and without reference to Parliament. This may be our last chance to influence the Government. Thus, Ministers are drawing up the rules and then acting as judge, jury and appeal court in respect of those rules. What trade union or other organisation would the Government allow to do that? They would not. There is no semblance of democracy in the Bill. It reeks of Government authoritarianism and centralisation. It all but destroys local democracy in the rate-capped local authority areas. I am gravely worried about the impact that it will have on Newham when it becomes law.

This is an evil measure proposed by an evil and desperate Government. It will force local authorities to act illegally simply because by obeying the measure they will destroy their communities. Given such a choice, if local authorities defy the Government and refuse to do the Tories' dirty work, the responsibility will lie entirely with this most socially divisive, undemocratic and economically illiterate Government.

9.13 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The debate has been characterised by excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). We would have had a speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), had she not had a baby girl on Saturday because this Bill seriously affects Southwark.

The Bill is about England, Wales and Scotland. Thirteen clauses apply to England and Wales and 2 two clauses, part II, to Scotland. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has been present during the debate, but no Scottish Member has spoken. There has not even been a representative from the Scottish Nationalist party. If there were a serious Scottish element in the Bill, an SNP Member would have been present. The only Scottish volunteer to grace our presence tonight is my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). The question arises as to why the Scottish Minister of State is to reply to this debate rather than the English Minister of State, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson).

Mr. Meadowcroft: Charisma.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) may say charisma, but I suspect that it is a matter of the algebra at the back of the Bill in schedule 2, and the Government's wise judgment that the Scottish Minister of State can better deal with those complicated formulae than the English Minister of State.

On the face of it, the Bill is highly technical. It takes 17 clauses and 4 schedules simply to state what everyone had thought was already the law, or so the Secretary of State would have the House believe. We should not allow the technical nature of the language of the Bill to obscure from the House and the country the real significance of this measure. The 17 clauses and 4 schedules speak volumes for the incompetence and arrogance of the Government and for their refusal to respect the rule of law.

This time last year the House was in the throes of the Westland crisis. The central player in that crisis from the Government's point of view was the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who was once the Secretary of State for the Environment. He started the Government down the road to local council chaos, although his successors as Secretaries of State had been all too willing to follow. When the present Secretary of State made his statement to the House about this Bill on 16 December, the right hon. Member for Henley sought to make light of his former responsibilities. He said in a question to the present Secretary of State:

"If I understand the thrust of a complex and technical statement by my right hon. Friend, it is that I have spent £30 billion of taxpayers' money illegally. If this judgment is right, I promise him my unswerving and urgent support for the legislation."

To which the Secretary of State replied:

"I thought for a moment that my right hon. Friend was going to offer to pay. I assure him that I would not suggest that for one moment. I do not suggest that we should apportion blame in this matter." — [*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol.107, c. 1055.]

This indeed would be a laughing matter were it not so serious. All of us understand why the Secretary of State does not wish to apportion blame, as he has been a member of the Government throughout the past seven sorry years. But it is the job of this House to determine responsibility; and the responsibility for this farce lies not with officials, legal advisers or parliamentary draftsmen but firmly with Ministers. They cannot claim that they were not warned. The basic Act from which all this trouble flows was the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. That Act was conceived in chaos and it will be recalled by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends that the Bill had to be withdrawn from the other place and resubmitted to this place before it had been debated. Even when the second Bill was debated, the Government learned no lessons from their experience.

At that time, the *Financial Times* made a withering comment when the Bill finally received royal assent. In 1980 the *Financial Times* said that in block grant

"the Government took . . . principles into legislation before any work had been done to test them in detail. As Mr. King was promoting his principles in committee, horrified civil servants were discovering that the more detailed work they did, the worse the mire in which they found themselves."

We now know, continued the *Financial Times*:

"block grant will not be any simpler, will not be any more logical, and will also be full of extraordinary anomalies, and potentially unfair and discriminatory factors—all of which will need complicated, sometimes arbitrary, and often crude mathematical factors to iron them out."

We, too, have warned the Government during the passage of the 1980 legislation and on every occasion since. We warned them that the increasing centralisation inherent in their legislation would lead to increasing levels of incompetence. We reminded them time and again, of Karl Popper's famous dictum—that while it is easy to centralise power, it is impossible to centralise the knowledge needed wisely to exercise that power.

The defects that the Bill seeks to put right have not arisen as an accident of drafting but as a natural and inevitable consequence of Government policy. They have arisen as a result of the Government seeking to control that which they have no need to control — local authorities' current expenditure financed from their own resources. They have also resulted from the Government using, as an instrument of that control, block grant, for which purpose it was never, and could never, be designed.

In the far-off days of the last Labour Government, such was the consensus around local government finance that in two successive years, rate support grant orders were not even debated, and this decision was made not by the Government of the day but by the Conservative Opposition. Legal challenges to the allocation of the rate support grant were virtually unknown. The simple reason for that is that, while central Government may have sought to influence the levels of local government spending, they never sought to control it. The amount of a local authority's grant was therefore finite. Authorities were not penalised if they spent above some arbitrary limit, so, at the margins, block grant decisions did not have the critical effect that they now have on local authority spending plans and on the size of their rate bills.

All that has now changed. The Government have stumbled from one pit of their own making to another, even deeper. One control has been heaped on another. Alongside the administrative chaos that has been produced has been the Government's frenetic rhetoric

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about local spending, rhetoric which is oddly hollow and two-faced when we see that at the same time as the Government damn local authority spending, they take credit for the spending levels of local authorities.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): On education.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Education reminds us, the Government damn the spending levels of Labour local authorities while taking on themselves their education spending records.

When the Secretary of State made his statement, he said:

"There has been a distinction between what people thought the law was and what it is. We can easily put that right, and the House can then pass on to more important matters."

I hardly call 17 clauses and schedules easy. He also said that the Bill was

"designed to make no changes in policy, but as far as possible to apply existing policy within a tight timetable."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1051-55.]

If that were the case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made clear, there could be little argument about the Bill. The truth is that the Secretary of State was less than frank, and came close to misleading the House. The Bill changes policy retrospectively in two key respects. Also, and more serious, it seeks to avoid the application of the rule of law and the supervision of the courts over the Secretary of State's decision.

Over the past four years, the House has had many opportunities to debate the occasions on which Parliament should retrospectively legislate. All are agreed that Parliament is sometimes justified in making lawful acts that were previously unlawful. No individual or institution is put at a disadvantage by such measures. We also acknowledge, although we may not agree, that sometimes it is necessary for Ministers to announce that, from a particular day, a particular transaction, usually of a financial nature, should be unlawful and that powers to provide for such unlawfulness would be sought and operate from the day of that statement, rather than the day of the Royal Assent. It was about such measures that there were many debates during the course of the abolition Act.

The Bill breaks new ground in local authority legislation. It seeks to make unlawful acts that have already occurred and which were done in the knowledge that at the time they were lawful. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) has given the House full details of the way in which the Bill will affect the city of Birmingham adversely. Many of us remember that in 1984, contrary to all the complacent predictions of the Conservative party, it was trounced in the local authority elections in Birmingham and the Labour party secured a famous victory.

The Conservative party has never forgiven the city of Birmingham for electing a Labour council. The Government pursued what can almost be described as a vendetta against that city. Last year the rate support grant Bill overturned a court case in which Birmingham had lawfully won an additional £8 million. Under the provisional rate support grant settlement, the grant gain has been taken away from Birmingham by rate capping amounting to £34·9 million. Under this Bill, Birmingham is denied another £7·5 million.

Trying to explain himself away, the Secretary of State said that these authorities would not have received this bit of rate support grant that is in contention in any event, but that is simply not the case. Transfers to special funds are crucial. A sum of money may be treated as expenditure in one year and income in another. Given the operation of the penalty system and the way in which the block grant has operated during the last seven years, the year in which such blocks of money are treated as expenditure and/or as income can have a significant effect upon an authority's block grant entitlement. The Department has always known that that is so. I can give evidence to the effect that sometimes the Department has advised authorities on how to maximise their block grant entitlement by shifting funds from one year to another.

Mr. Ridley: But if there were no funds and the funds that were shifted did not exist, then I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to agree with me that that was a fiddle.

Mr. Straw: Yes, but since we are considering Birmingham, what the Secretary of State has to explain is how it was that Price Waterhouse, the private auditors appointed by the city of Birmingham, said:

"We have considered this issue in some detail and have concluded that the contribution is a lawful charge."

Price Waterhouse did not say that it was a fiddle. It said that it was a lawful charge. Is the Secretary of State saying that Price Waterhouse failed in its professional duty? Has he reported Price Waterhouse to the professional bodies that are responsible for supervising accountants? Of course he has not. However, he has accused not just the city of Birmingham but Price Waterhouse of a fiddle. I give the Secretary of State an opportunity to withdraw.

Mr. Ridley: The Government would not have paid block grant upon the information that was available to them. If Birmingham or any other authority did not like that, it could have taken us to law. What is more, it would have lost.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State says that, what is more, Birmingham would have lost. I ask the Secretary of State to give Birmingham the chance to take him to court. Let us see who is right and who is wrong. Last year Birmingham took the Secretary of State to court and he lost. Therefore, the Government changed the law. If the Secretary of State is now inviting legal challenge from Birmingham, I am sure that Birmingham will be happy to accept his challenge. When the Bill is considered in detail, I hope that the Secretary of State will remove from it clause 4(6) and clause 6(4) so that Birmingham and other cities may be given precisely that opportunity. When the Secretary of State intervened he did not answer my point. He accused Birmingham and its auditors of a fiddle. On that point, he had better either put up or shut up.

The second way in which the Bill is wholly objectionable relates to rate capping. Three years ago, almost to the day, the Rates Bill, which gave unprecedented centralised powers to the Secretary of State, was given its Second Reading. We were told in this Chamber and in Committee that local authorities had no need to worry—that if the Government decided upon provisional expenditure limits, on the basis of their own information for individual authorities, which turned out to be wrong, individual local authorities would be able to offer information about their position and submit it to the

Secretary of State and that not once but twice he would reconsider the matter and make a decision on the merits of the case submitted by individual authorities. For two years at least Secretaries of State have sought to judge authorities on the basis of individual merit. Not so now. The process of redetermination has been reduced to a farce by this Bill. Any consideration of the individual positions of local authorities has been abandoned. On 19 December I wrote to the Secretary of State on exactly this point.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The letter was in joined-up writing.

Mr. Straw: Indeed it was in my own hand. I asked the Secretary of State about the effect of this Bill on his discretion separately to determine the expenditure limits on certain authorities. He replied that there were standard formulae in the Bill and his letter went on to say:

"These formulae reflect my views and those of the appropriate Secretaries of State for the redeterminations, if any, which should be made to the expenditure levels which were determined in July 1986. Our views take account of all the information available to us . . . and the representations we have received since July, including representations made in support of redetermination applications."

Frankly, that reply was disingenuous, because it is plain from the Bill and from what the Secretary of State said earlier in this debate that the decisions contained in this Bill are different from the decisions that he would have made had he been exercising his discretion on the merits of individual authorities.

The Secretary of State said in answer to an intervention —I believe I quote him correctly—that the formulae in the Bill accurately, though not totally accurately, reflect decisions that he would have made on redetermination. Can the Secretary of State tell us the difference between accuracy and total accuracy in this matter? Will he provide the House with a schedule showing the decisions that he would have made had he made individual redeterminations in respect of each of these authorities? Is he willing to do that? I will allow him to intervene if he wishes to do so. He has admitted that there is a gap between accuracy and total accuracy. If the gap is significant, will he agree to amend the formula?

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) asked the Secretary of State if it was correct that paragraph 3(2) of schedule 2 gave the Secretary of State the power to revise the expenditure limits for any authority up to the point at which the Bill passes into law. I understand that the Minister of State is to reply to that point. If that is the correct reading of this sub-paragraph, and it appears to be, is the Secretary of State willing to use that discretion to deal with the very real problems that have arisen in Newham and in many other boroughs?

Mr. Spearing: Is my hon. Friend aware that the letter from which he has just quoted can hardly be correct and might even be categorised as deceitful because the table which I have supplied to the Minister and which I will supply to my hon. Friend shows that the range of GREA plus percentage to expenditure limit ranges from Basildon which is 70 per cent. above GREA to Newham which is 1·6 per cent. above GREA. How can the redetermination which the Secretary of State says he has taken into account produce such disparate percentages?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. These policy decisions are now produced through algebra and buried in a schedule. The circumstances of authorities vary dramatically. It is accepted that Newham is spending barely above the amount set by central Government, yet Newham's redetermination is no different from that of any other authority, regardless of the fact that circumstances are wholly different. But for this Bill, if Newham felt that it was being treated wholly unreasonably it could take the Secretary of State to court. That brings me to the most serious aspect of the Bill—its denial of the rule of law. I hope that Conservative Members who spent much time on the hustings preaching about the rule of law will look at what the Bill proposes and will agree that it is a constitutional monstrosity.

During the proceedings on the Rates Bill, Ministers tried to reassure us that they could not act capriciously or arbitrarily in exercising the wide discretion that they had been given because the wider rule of law required them to exercise that discretion reasonably and because, in any event, the courts would prevent them from making decisions for which they had no power. The judicial supervision of Acts of Government is central to any concept of the rule of law in a democracy, but under this Bill all that is cast aside. Clauses 4(6) and 6(4) state that they

"shall have effect notwithstanding any decision of a court (whether before or after the passing of this Act) purporting to have a contrary effect."

One would expect such a statement only in an authoritarian, totalitarian and dictatorial regime.

The subsections state that the Bill shall have effect notwithstanding any decision of a court purporting to have a contrary effect. But the effect of the clause is not clear. It is not clear on the face of the clause what is being denied judicial supervision. What if an authority went to court to discover the effects of the clause over which the courts have no discretion? Will the Minister confirm that, since the Bill is so obscure, local authorities at least have the right to discover from the courts that over which the courts no longer have discretion so that, by subtraction, they can discover that over which the courts continue to have discretion?

Later tonight, there will be a motion to commit the Bill to a Committee of the whole House and to deny the House the detailed scrutiny of such a technical Bill that can take place only upstairs in Committee. That will be justified on the grounds that the matter is urgent, and I have no doubt that the subsequent threats of guillotine will be accompanied by a similar excuse. Those excuses will not wash, for the Secretary of State has admitted that he knew about this fandango and farce at least four months ago. We have had no explanation of why it took him three months to come to the House and four months to produce the Bill. Many Labour Members have every reason to believe that the Secretary of State deliberately delayed the matter for as long as possible to deny Parliament a proper scrutiny of the amending legislation.

This is a Bill born of the incompetence and arrogance of a Government who care little for local democracy and who know even less. They refuse to listen, not just to the Opposition and to Labour local authorities, but to Conservative local authorities and to those in the House who speak for them. Contrary to the Secretary of State's undertakings, the Bill contains policy changes. It legislates retrospectively to make unlawful decisions which, when taken, were lawful, at a cost of millions of pounds to some authorities. It removes the rights of the courts of this land

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to scrutinise legislation in a manner almost unprecedented in a democracy. It puts the Government above the law. It is a bad Bill, and we shall oppose it tonight.

9.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): We have had a very full debate on the Bill. From Conservative Members we have had a thorough appreciation of the logical reasons for the Bill and for their support of it. From Labour Members we have had synthetic fury laced with tortured sarcasm. We should have expected no more. It is a sign of the paucity of their arguments in the face of this legislation.

This is a highly technical Bill, the details of which will be considered fully in Committee. However, there is a simple principle behind the Bill: to maintain the status quo in the conduct of local government finance in the run-up to the major reforms which we propose, which were welcomed by many of my hon. Friends. This means continuing with the definitions of expenditure adopted in line with the wishes of local government in England, Wales and Scotland and providing, for England and Wales, for the rate support grant settlement and the rate limitation process to be implemented with the maximum of certainty for authorities, given the need for this legislation.

I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) for his excellent speech of support and for what he said in justification of the Bill. Throughout the afternoon Opposition Members have looked for sinister motives behind every clause of the Bill. I fear that their search will go unrewarded. They would be better occupied assisting the Bill's passage so that local authorities can be sure of receiving the grant to which they are entitled from the start of the new financial year. I should tell the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) that that is not a threat. It is a statement of fact and, in the light of it, I hope that he will support the Government's efforts.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made much of what he called the delay occasioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I reject that entirely. If the hon. Gentleman is sincere about his concern at the effect that delay will have on local authorities and their grant next year, we expect him to support our getting the Bill on to the statute book as soon as possible.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. It is not a question of argument about delay — the delay is a matter of fact. The Secretary of announced today, at long last, that he knew about this four months ago. There is no argument about that—it is a fact. As for letting the Bill go through, if the Minister will remove the retrospective clauses and set in abeyance the punitive restrictions on the Rates Act 1984, we will let it go through.

Mr. Ancram: I shall come to what the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said in their speeches. If the hon. Gentleman is sincere about his concern at the effect on RSG, he will support the Bill.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have argued that, rather than bolster the present system, in which faults are widely acknowledged, we should have turned immediately to the Green Paper reform proposals. I have considerable sympathy for that view—it was advanced strongly by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts)—but it is impossible to set up that new system and the necessary transitional measures in the time available. Today's debate has shown, once again, the urgent need for such reform. Reform is already being undertaken in Scotland.

I listened to what my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) said about reform. I agree with him about the appalling complexities of the present system, but I am sure that it will be no surprise to him to learn that I did not agree with him about our proposals for Scotland, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made clear he will bring forward for England. I rather think that my hon. Friend and I may argue about this for some time. We might not reach an agreement immediately, but I am always hopeful that I will in the end convert him.

Mr. Leighton: As the Minister is making the case for great haste and saying that that precludes local authorities from having time to come in for redetermination, does he agree that, in Committee, proper consideration should be given to the cases, such as the borough of Newham, which are harshly treated by the Bill?

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I am sure that this is a matter that will be discussed during the Bill's further proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough, supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), for Halifax (Mr. Galley) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess), said that the grant proposals which are implicit in the Green Paper on rate reform would create a simpler system than that which has caused so many problems. I endorse that view. Those proposals are now part of the legislation for Scotland that we are taking through Committee. They are part of a package which depends also on creating greater accountability through the imposition of the community charge. It would not be possible to introduce that element of the package alone now.

The hon. Member for Blackburn asked why I am responding to the debate. I suggest that, under this Government at least, we are still one United Kingdom, of which Scotland is a part. I remind him, not that it would have been evident if he had looked behind him during the debate, that one fifth of the parliamentary representation of his party comes from Scotland. It is quite right, therefore, that Scotland's view should be represented. When my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, made his statement on 16 December a point of order was raised as to why there was no statement on the Scottish position. The reason was, as my right hon. Friend said today in his opening speech, that in Scotland the problem is much more limited than in England and Wales. At the same time, I believe that it would be wholly wrong if the Scottish dimension was ignored tonight.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Will the hon. Gentleman say a word or two about the Scottish dimension? I see that the Secretary of State is taking powers to indemnify himself, and to ensure that his actions in connection with section 5 of the 1966 Act should not be called in question. It is not clear to me why he needs that indemnity. Indemnity suggests that something wrong has been done, or at least, that something is likely to be successfully challenged in the courts. Perhaps the Minister

will just say what the secret sin is, and what the effect would have been if the law had been properly carried out by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ancram: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting Labour's Scottish voice on to the record, even this late in the debate. I shall deal with his points, because I think that the provisions regarding Scotland are important, and I want to explain them fully.

The most important point is that the determination of rate support grant in Scotland does not depend in any way on assessments of relevant or total expenditure, but rather on what local authorities ought to need to spend as determined by a process of assessment known as the client group method, which is intended to provide objective assessments of need, taking into account the different circumstances of each authority. It quite specifically does not take account of their actual expenditure, however defined, and because the determination of the Scottish rate support grant does not depend on any assessment of actual expenditure, it follows that the Secretary of State's actions in determining it are not vulnerable on the basis that he might have misinterpreted what can or cannot legitimately be included as expenditure.

However, on examining our Scottish practices in the light of the problems which have emerged in England and Wales, we discovered that we have counted as expenditure transfers between the general rate fund and special funds in assessing authorities' expenditure for the purpose of imposing grant penalties. According to the system we operate, we would also have been prepared to count such transfers as expenditure had they occurred in the accounts of authorities for whom we were proposing a rate reduction.

An examination of the particular cases where rate reductions have been imposed reveals that there were no such transfers of funds at issue. Clauses 14 and 15 are designed to validate past decisions in relation to grant penalties and to allow us to continue to operate as before, both in the case of grant penalties and in the case of rate reductions.

Mr. Dewar: I recognise that the Minister wants these Scottish points properly ventilated. I promise him that I will read with great care the important statement that he has just read.

Will he confirm my impression that he is saying that the Government are seeking indemnity against a set of circumstances which he is satisfied never occurred? If that is so, why on earth do we need clauses 14 and 15?

Mr. Ancram: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has never been a great expert on local government finance. He may therefore find my explanation difficult to understand. What I was saying, and perhaps I can put it in simpler terms for the hon. Gentleman, is that on selective action, there has been no occasion, according to our records, where any authority would have suffered because of the interpretation that has been made. However, the situation is different in relation to grant penalties.

It is an important point that there is no Scottish authority in relation to which we have imposed a rate of reduction which has had a greater reduction imposed on it than it would have had if consideration of special funds had been excluded from our calculations. More to the point in relation to grant penalties, if consideration of special funds had been excluded from our calculations, according to our records there are two instances from 1983-84 where authorities would have been better off; that is, their grant reduction would have been less than it actually is. In the case of one of those authorities that applies to the present financial year, so it is still possible for it to avoid paying grant penalties completely.

Again — this is important to put the matter into context — according to our records, in 32 instances exclusion of consideration of special funds made no difference at all to the grant penalties, and in 29 cases the authorities concerned would have been worse off, in many cases substantially so. That demonstrates clearly the point that the method that we have adopted in calculating expenditure for grant penalty purposes and which we propose, as a result of the Bill, to continue, is clearly seen to be in the interests of local authorities. That is presumably why the local authority associations wish this type of interpretation and calculation to be made.

It also underlines the completely synthetic nature of the Opposition's hostility to these measures today. In the light of the favourable impact that that has had on local authorities in Scotland, I shall be interested to see whether the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) votes against the validation of that tonight. The hon. Members for Copeland and for Blackburn took exception to clause 5 because they argued that it would allow the Secretary of State to make retrospective adjustments to previous years' settlements. They have completely missed the point. Our clear intention is to maintain the status quo and the clause allows us to do that on a proper statutory basis where decisions are to be taken on supplementary reports for the years 1983-84 to 1986-87.

My right hon. Friend has no intention of departing from past practice in that respect. My hon. Friends the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) were also worried about that point and I hope that they are reassured by what I have said.

Under existing powers in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, it is open to the Secretary of State to make new directions about total expenditure before each new supplementary report is made—subject, of course, to the overriding legal requirement to act reasonably. That is the same position as that which will apply to the powers to make specifications about total expenditure when new supplementary reports are made for 1983-84 to 1986-87 after Royal Assent has been given to the Bill. Therefore, there is no type of retrospection which is new to the Bill which is not available already under existing powers. The type and concept are the same. I hope that that firmly answers the points that were made by the hon. Members for Copeland and for Blackburn.

I do not want to repeat the detailed summary of the Bill given by my right hon. Friend at the start of the debate. However, I should underline that there is no intention here to create new structures or impose new burdens on local authorities. The Bill builds on an existing mechanism, which is usually called the rate fund revenue account, and translates into statute what is effectively current practice in defining expenditure. So far as possible, it adopts the wording of the provisions of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Hon. Members will, of course, have the opportunity to consider the details in Committee.

The hon. Member for Copeland mentioned the promises about the operation of what is now the Rates Act during and after its passage. He was somewhat wide of the

[Mr. Ancram]

mark on this occasion. We accept that we are not following the Rates Act procedures. My right hon. Friend has explained why we have to adopt, for 1987-88 only, the approach to rate and precept limitation contained in the Bill. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Copeland will listen rather than muttering from a sedentary position, he may, yet again, hear the explanation. It would simply not have been possible to carry through the normal Rates Act procedures, given the need for legislation on the definition of expenditure.

Labour Members have sought to argue that the method adopted and the formulae proposed in the Bill are wildly unreasonable. In reaching decisions on the formulae, the Secretaries of State took account, as in any normal year, of all the information available to them about the designated authorities. They took particular note of applications for the redetermination of expenditure levels. The representations made at meetings about those applications were carefully considered. Of course, given the need for the formula approach, limits cannot be precisely tailored to individual circumstances as in a normal year, but, so far as is possible, they reflect decisions that would have been taken under Rates Act procedures, and those decisions are now subject to the scrutiny of Parliament.

Before leaving rate limitation, I should remind the House what it is all about. Some Opposition Members seem to have forgotten its purpose. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) reminded us that the aim of the policy is to protect ratepayers by holding down rates and expenditure.

Some authorities, despite being rate-limited in 1985-86 and 1986-87, have attempted to maintain their high levels of spending and have taken no steps to cut out waste and inefficiency or other unnecessary burdens on their ratepayers. It is right that the disciplines of rate limitation should be firmly maintained.

Mr. Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No. I have already given way on a number of occasions.

Where authorities are newly selected for rate capping in 1987-88, my right hon. Friend has proposed some additional flexibility above the original expenditure levels set in July, but the fact remains that those authorities were selected because they were among the highest spenders, and the purpose of rate limitation is to restrain that spending and to protect ratepayers.

The hon. Members for Copeland and for Blackburn asked whether paragraph 3(2) of schedule 2 would enable my right hon. Friend to determine revised expenditure levels for rate-capped authorities before the passing of the Bill. The answer is no. As my right hon. Friend made clear to the House in his statement on 16 December, once he had received the advice on total expenditure, he could not make any further rate support grant reports or complete the rate limitation process until matters were put right and there was new legislation. Thus, at the moment he cannot redetermine expenditure levels, and once the Bill receives Royal Assent there will be, only for 1987-88, a new method for completing the rate limitation process according to the formulae in the Bill.

A number of Opposition Members mentioned the effect of the Bill on court decisions. The hon. Member for Copeland made great play of clauses 4(6) and 6(4). Those provisions validate past decisions on rate support grant and rate limitation respectively. We accept that, until the Bill receives Royal Assent, the validity of past decisions is in doubt. Nothing but further uncertainty would be gained by local authorities challenging those decisions. The Bill clearly and unambiguously provides that challenges against past decisions will be of no effect.

The Bill is not concerned, as the hon. Member for Copeland appeared to be suggesting, with validating future decisions taken in accordance with the provisions of the Bill and the related legislation. Local authorities will, of course, be free to challenge those.

A number of hon. Members mentioned deficit financing. The Bill provides that the Secretary of State may make specifications to discount for grant purposes contributions to special funds against no known liability which create a deficit on the rate fund revenue account and the subsequent drawing down of such contributions. The Bill will put the position beyond doubt. Had the need for the Bill not arisen, the Secretary of State would have taken the action under existing powers. It has been suggested that some sort of conspiracy is involved but, again, Opposition Members are well wide of the mark.

The Bill is not controversial, except in the conspiratorial minds of Opposition Members. It is necessary in the interests of councils which have previously endorsed the principle that it now firmly establishes. It is also in the interests of ratepayers and of good government, both local and national. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 247, Noes 179.

Division No. 49] **[10 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh

Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbo'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kennath *(Stam'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Gerald Malone.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*

Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

The House divided: Ayes 233, Noes 175.

Division No. 50] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Malone and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*

Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified — Resolved.

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliamemt of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act — *[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Residential Care Homes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

10.26 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I am especially pleased tonight to initiate this short Adjournment debate on residential care homes for the elderly, which is a matter of great concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House and which has become a growth industry over the years.

I first became especially worried about residential homes in December 1985. Although the new Registered Homes Act 1984 provided for every home to be inspected not less than twice in every 12-month period, it did not prescribe a minimum number of beds. Similarly, although it required the person registered to provide adequate professional, technical, ancillary and other staff and to make adequate arrangements for patients in the home to receive medical and dental services where necessary, it did not really define what was adequate or professional.

On looking through the papers and assessing the numbers of such homes, I was horrified by the tremendous growth in residential care homes. Although I am not in any way criticising private enterprise, it seems especially easy for anyone to set up a residential care home. I welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security on the Front Bench tonight, and I particularly wish to draw her attention to the private sector homes in England. I am satisfied that local authority homes appear to be properly policed, but it seems that private sector homes are not always properly assessed. In 1984 there were 4,090 such homes with 50,168 residents. In 1985 the number of homes had risen to 5,200 and the residents to 69,000. By 1986, on the provisional figures that my right hon. Friend the Minister gave me on 27 November, there were 6,303 homes and something like 80,000 residents.

Residential care homes are a very successful industry. It is a growth industry and one in which I would expect the quality of care provided in the homes to be of the utmost in usefulness, kindness, love and great care. My hon. Friend the Minister's predecessor made it quite clear that there would be an examination of the standards being set locally by the authorities concerned and of the extent to which the legislation is being implemented, in ways that seek to develop constructive partnerships between the statutory, voluntary and private sectors of residential care.

However, one must obviously look at the provisions of the 1984 Act and at the role placed on the local social service authorities and the district health authorities respectively. I want to see the improved arrangements for registering and inspecting all residential care homes brought forward. I know that they came into force on 1 January 1985, but I am not convinced that they are as thorough in their investigations and examinations as the Act originally intended. There is a difficulty, because we are reducing Government interference in many areas. "Building Businesses not Barriers" makes specific reference to the registration of such homes and their inspection.

In no way do I wish any registered home to have fewer than two inspections per year. It is welcome that the overall fees for such homes have risen—the annual fee has been increased to £15 a place, the annual registration fee to £100 and the initial registration fee to £550. Therefore, proprietors of homes should expect at least quarterly inspections by representatives of the DHSS or local authorities. I believe that local authorities should carry out the first inspection, and that thereafter the DHSS should keep a watching brief.

I know of many instances where local authorities have telephoned homes and said, "We are coming next week, stand by for inspection." Although I do not wish the element of surprise to be Gestapo-like, the inspections should be carried out regularly and without too much advance notice. I want homes to demonstrate love and care and attention at all times. The requirements are quite clear. I want residential homes to be bright, bustling and happy. Safety should be a priority, with no loose rugs, unexpected steps to gardens or bathrooms, awkward stairs or old wiring.

Age Concern has studied the problems in such homes. There should be a proper fee structure for residents, who can so easily be taken advantage of. Some elderly people, as their age advances, become somewhat of a burden in the family home and it becomes necessary for them to be put in residential care. I am happy to state that no residential homes in Leicester take advantage of the elderly, but dangerous precedents could be established. Homes should show kindness and provide proper professional help.

I know of homes that maintain that full medical staff are available 24 hours a day. Certainly, registered nursing homes would be required to meet that criterion. However, the Registered Homes Act 1984 also implies that properly qualified medical staff should be in attendance at all times. It is no good just having a doctor on the board and his name appearing on the headed paper — medical staff should be available at the home. The proprietors of registered homes—who should live on the premises—should make the position quite clear. I know of cases of staff being dressed up to look like nurses, which gives a false impression to the inspectors and prospective residents alike.

I understand that poaching has occurred — where residents are visited by nice old ladies saying, "Come on, let's go and have a nice strawberry tea". They take them to another residential care home, and the next thing is that that elderly person has been "poached" and easy money is made.

Because there is no stipulation as to the minimum number of beds required in a residential care home, sometimes beds are moved out of rooms when the proprietors know that the inspectors are due to visit, to make what is really a double room look like a single room. That is absolute deceit and easy pickings. I know of a case in the Birmingham area where an elderly gentleman is being charged £16,000 a year by a residential care home. I find it incredible that he is kicked out of bed at 6.30 am and forced back to bed at 6 pm, does not have good food and is lucky if he meets other people during the day. Something must be done to guide prospective residential care home proprietors as to the requirement and comforts that should be available to all prospective residents.

I asked my hon. Friend's predecessor to introduce a band of price ranges for facilities. I know that it is unusual for a Right-wing Tory Member to call for Government interference, but I believe that a minimum and maximum charge should be stipulated for providing permanent

residential accommodation. That residential charge should be in a band from £125 that the DHSS allows to perhaps £160. I ask my hon. Friend to look at this, because £240, which is a regular charge, is incredible for the services provided, some of which are questionable.

It is clear that too many of these homes are registered too soon. On my way in the mornings, I pass two large terraced houses. Over three months, they have become a residential care home, but that is too quick. While it is worthwhile to register and establish homes, this must not be done too quickly. At the moment the number of old people is increasing rapidly. I do not want them to be taken advantage of, and I want to see such precautions as proper fire escapes. Health and safety officers have a right of entry, but perhaps do not go to such places often enough, particularly as so many are now being established. The officers should be allowed in to get on with checking.

Many of these old people are disabled and should not be put in upstairs rooms. They can be taken up and down by lift, but they might be trapped up there. They must be treated with humanity and kindness at all times. Many residential care home proprietors show much more love, kindness and decency than some relations. That is a sad fact of life.

On the coldest day of the year, with Big Ben stopping at four o'clock for a few minutes, we should remember that elderly people need as much warmth as possible—not just blankets but proper facilities. I look forward to inspections and investigations taking place in the winter. At the moment, many of these places seem to be inspected only in the spring. Let us ensure that conditions are examined at the worst time of the year. I am not arguing for cold payments, I reassure my hon. Friend the Minister.

Another factor is that many people are living longer. Britain has a reputation for an increasing number of people living over the age of 65. Residential care will be a growth industry and it is important that we provide maximum as well as minimum requirements to ensure that inspections are carried out at all times, although that is already required under section 17 (ii) of the Registered Homes Act. There should be more inspections, and I urge my hon. Friend to look at this and at the charges. It would be a great service to the public if she were to introduce a system of minimum and maximum charges both for residential care homes and nursing homes.

The type of accommodation is varied. In some of the advisory documents it has been made clear that some people would like to share, but they should not be charged £16,000 a year if they do so. Multi-occupancy and connecting rooms should be considered. There is no ratio of single to double occupancy. No two people are the same, as the local authority circular of January 1986 pointed out. We must look on our elderly people with even greater respect.

We should consider how to strengthen the Registered Homes Act 1984 to do something about the lack of safeguards. It will mean a substantial increase in the cost of running the homes but a big increase in health and safety checks, which is important. I would like to see 24-hour medical cover, and qualified nurses, who know how to cope with emergencies, on the premises. I do not want people dressing up as auxiliaries when they are not.

I should like a scale of maximum and minimum charges to be published. That would ensure that no elderly people or their relations are caught out by having to pay for hidden extras to get the basic service. Private enterprise should continue to thrive, but old people's homes should be exempted so that there is the best possible control over them. I am not in favour of NUPE's idea of midnight visits, but the inspection system must be updated as a matter of urgency. It is no use telephoning a residential care home and saying, "I should like to visit you; what time can I come?" There should not be too many unannounced visits, but proper visits must be made.

I welcome the increase in fees. Proprietors of residential care homes will realise that, once they are registered, there are effective safeguards. If registration and licensing are made a little harder, they will be worth far more.

In the east midlands there is a very good organisation that looks after residential care homes. I congratulate it and Mrs. Heather Cowley. Nevertheless, we must ensure that all these homes are up to the same standard and that it is not made easy for buildings to be converted overnight into brand new residential care homes. This is a growth industry. We must do everything in our power to protect the elderly. They are living longer. I look forward to many other hon. Members on both sides of the House saying that they are in favour of additional help and support being provided for the elderly.

Only 650 people have gone into residential care homes in Leicestershire. Proprietors of residential care homes have written to me. The proprietor of a home in Eastbourne says:

"People are openly advertising and taking three elderly people with no supervision and possibly not even paying tax. This is a situation that needs to be looked into. May I add that whatever the room size, the facilities offered, it is the owners and their attitudes to the care, dignity and quality of life of those people in their area that really matters."

Letters of support have come from the Isle of Wight community health council. It has asked for updates on the way to curb the increase in private residential care homes which has been unleashed. There is also a letter from the South Warwickshire community health council. It is extremely worried about the growth in the number of residential care homes.

I welcome the fact that the private enterprise sector has resulted in many more new proprietors of residential care homes, but I urge my hon. Friend and her Department to look carefully at the way in which the elderly are cared for. The Department of Health and Social Security will pay most of the price, but it should not be a blank cheque. It might price itself out of the market. The elderly must be given the best possible help, love and attention, and the safeguards that I have outlined will ensure that when an elderly person enters a residential care home he is given love, care and attention by properly trained staff. There must be regular inspections and the fees charged must be such as to provide for elderly people the kind of service that will enable them to live in dignity for the rest of their lives.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on his success in Mr. Speaker's ballot and for choosing such an important subject. He has already shown great interest in this topic. I read his November article in *Social Work Today* with great interest. I assure him and all concerned of the importance that the Government place on voluntary and private residential care homes and

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

on their having proper standards, and I am sure he agrees that they have a vital role to play in the provision of community care.

I was a little sad that my hon. Friend used the word "horrified" when he referred to this growth. That growth and development have been meeting a considerable need and it is good to see the private sector doing it so well.

Let me deal with a number of the points that my hon. Friend raised. He mentioned control on charges by homes. There is no control on those charges any more than there is for any other services and we would not wish to see any. The amounts paid are a matter between those running the homes and the residents or the relatives of the residents who are meeting those charges. The charges could be expected to reflect the services and the facilities available as determined by market forces, in which my hon. Friend and I have considerable faith.

In our view, it would not be proper to introduce a system of minimum and maximum charges for the provision of services paid for privately. I know that my hon. Friend is a keen supporter of a free market and, as he is aware, many of the residents of these homes are well able to pay the prices set, especially if they have disposed of a property before entering a home. The same applies to what my hon. Friend called poaching. That is a private, commercial matter between homes and it is not for the Department of Health and Social Security to intervene.

In one case of misrepresentation in a home for mentally handicapped people in Manchester, the registration of that home was cancelled and an appeal by the owner of the home against that cancellation was not upheld. We are aware that where there may be serious misrepresentations we have the right and the power to act. The payment of supplementary benefit is another matter and I shall now deal with that.

My hon. Friend mentioned growth in the number of homes as a whole and growth in the number of residents. I am sure he will not mind if I refer to the number of supplementary benefit board and lodging claimants in independent homes in Great Britain, because it gives an idea of the increasing responsibility of the Department. In 1978 the number of residents claiming board and lodging allowance was 7,000. The amount being spent was £6 million and the average payment was £15·70 per resident. By 1984, the number of claimants was 42,000. Spending had risen to £200 million from £6 million, and the average payment was £91·50 per resident. These figures relate to Scotland as well as to England and Wales. We do not yet have information for 1985, although the Audit Commission recently estimated that some £500 million was now in payment. We are not in entire agreement with the Audit Commission about how it arrived at its figure, but there is no doubt that the amount has increased quite substantially.

The growth in these numbers was not entirely unexpected and to the extent that it meets a need not previously met it is welcome, but it showed us the need for better targeting of the benefit and improved expenditure control. For that reason, a number of studies were set in hand and the amounts to be paid were set at maxima around the country. A working party is currently looking at the arrangements for financial support of residents in all types of residential care homes — local authority, voluntary, and private. That working party is chaired by the Department's official, Mrs. Joan Firth. Our aim is a system of financial support which is responsive to the needs of individuals and which gives better value for public money. The working party will report to Ministers and to local authority associations around Easter this year.

A series of pilot studies have been undertaken by Professor Bradshaw from York university and they have been conducted in four areas—Lothian, Clwyd, Devon and Sefton—to see if the local authorities could advise us on whether a system of assessment could be introduced to see if supplementary benefit claimants in residential homes are most appropriately cared for in that setting and whether the homes' charges are reasonable in the light of the services provided. We expect that report to come to us by Easter.

As my hon. Friend knows, the limits placed on the supplementary payments to residents were reviewed last year following a study of homes' costs by the management consultants Ernst and Whinney. Their report is in the Library. As my hon. Friend may well know, as a result of that report some maxima were increased. The limits for the elderly were set at £125 per week with a London limit of £142·50 and a new category for the very dependent elderly eligible for higher rates of attendance allowance and for the blind was set at £140 with a London rate of £157·50, and a further category of younger physically disabled has been set at £197·50 for London and £180 for the rest of the country. Therefore, we have set maxima of the payments that we are prepared to meet from supplementary benefit. The Ernst and Whinney study produced a usable response from only about 23 per cent. of the homes that were contacted, but the study showed that at least some homes were using the supplementary benefit figures as maxima, whereas many others were not. However, the other studies should tell us more about that.

I share my hon. Friend's interest in and concern about standards. I am sure that we agree that the vast majority of homes offer an excellent standard of care—often far higher than those of the local authorities which we are asking to supervise them. Since 1948, residential care homes have had to be registered with local social services authorities. That registration is not automatic. The registration authorities must be satisfied, among other things, that the person applying for registration is fit to run a particular type of home and that the facilities, staffing and care provided are up to the standard required. The authorities can insist on alterations before granting the registration, and it is the local authority's responsibility, under all the legislation going back for a long time, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained. It is required to carry out at least one inspection a year. It need not give notice or make an appointment. It can visit at night and in the winter. Indeed, some home proprietors have been complaining about late-night visits, although I agree with my hon. Friend that they may need to be done in that way.

The homes are also subject to environmental health officers' standards and fire service requirements, and the home proprietors have had occasion to complain about that, too. They are also subject to the Inland Revenue, like any other business, and anyone not declaring income may have a nasty surprise in store.

My hon. Friend asked about realistic registration fees. Under the Registered Homes Act 1984, the initial fee is £550, plus £100 for a manager, where relevant, and a further charge of £15 a place annually. A typical home

with 30 or 35 places is certainly paying about £500 a year to the local authority. The penalty for offences has been increased from a maximum of £500 to £2,000. There is a national list of council registrations which is updated quarterly, and there have been 82 residential care home appeals to the Registered Homes Tribunal against local authorities' refusal to register a home or decision to cancel or amend a registration. So far, nine appeals have been upheld, 28 dismissed and 22 withdrawn.

In addition, a non-statutory code of practice, "Home-Life", which is in the Library, has been drawn up by an independent working party and forms the basis for the recommendations that we request the registering authorities to make and to carry out in their inspections of private homes.

My hon. Friend will be aware that some of his suggestions would require primary legislation. Since the law has been in operation for only two years—it came into force almost exactly two years ago—it would be wise to see how it has operated during those two years and how its objectives can be carried forward before we start to amend and reorganise it, especially since we are talking about so many homes and individuals.

Some concern has been expressed about the minimum of four residents for registration. In practice, that has been the minimum for a long time. It was thought that the line had to be drawn somewhere and that it should remain there. The 1985 costing study by the social services inspectorate showed us that local authorities were hard pressed in processing new registrations and inspecting existing homes that had to be registered even before we set them further tasks. If we were to ask them to inspect the tiniest homes, they might be put under such pressure that they would miss problems in homes on which we have asked them to keep an eye.

My hon. Friend asked about staff and standards. Unless the private residential home is dually registered as a nursing home, in which case it must be registered with the health authority and the rules about nursing and other staff are slightly different, it is not required to have staff with medical or nursing qualifications. The care normally provided in a residential care home is broadly equivalent to what might be given by a competent and caring relative able to respond to emotional as well as physical needs. Therefore, a medical and nursing qualfication is not considered necessary. Any professional health care needed by a resident would be provided by his or her general practitioner or the community nursing service, as appropriate, and under its supervision. To ask for 24-hour medical cover for an ordinary residential care home would be going over the top, except in so far as someone who was ill did not receive such cover from his general practitioner.

On top of all of the other studies that I have mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked Sir Roy Griffiths to do a review of community care. Between Griffiths, Firth, Bradshaw and the review of residential care currently being chaired by Lady Wagner, this sector is probably being investigated more than almost anything else.

In the light of all of those studies, some of which are to report to us very shortly and some of which are to report to us later—such as the Wagner report which will come in 1988 — I would prefer to see how the current legislation, which is relatively new, is carried out in practice and ensure that we do not change something before it has had time to settle in.

In those ways, the sector is being studied and encouraged to expand and develop in satisfactory and suitable ways to provide a good standard of care. We will take careful note of all of the recommendations, including those of my hon. Friend, and I am most grateful to him for raising this most important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time tomorrow.

DYFED BILL *[Lords]*

WEST GLAMORGAN BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second time and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before we start on Questions, I say to the House that I have a voice difficulty today. There is nothing wrong with my eyesight or my hearing. I hope that I shall not have to use my voice too much. I ask for the assistance of the House.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Hospital Treatment

1. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he takes to investigate complaints from National Health Service patients about the treatment they receive in National Health Service hospitals.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): The investigation of complaints made by National Health Service patients about National Health Service hospital treatment is a matter for the appropriate health authority.

Mr. Adley: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Nevetheless, I bring to his attention the fact that some of my hon. Friends and I have received a number of serious complaints about medical decisions taken and treatment received by patients attending the Royal Victoria hospital at Boscombe, which is outwith but near my constituency. To my knowledge, at least four deaths were involved, including the death of a relative of an hon. Member. Unfortunately, in spite of my right hon. Friend's answer, the regional health authority appeared to obfuscate behind a smokescreen of anonymity. It was unwilling to arrange a meeting with those concerned and me, and now has even failed to reply to my last letter of 27 November. What redress do members of the public have in the face of this situation?

Mr. Fowler: In view of what my hon. Friend said, it would be sensible, perhaps, if he were to meet the Minister for Health on this matter. The hospital in question seeks to give a good service, and many people speak highly of it.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Secretary of State reconsider his earlier answer and extend the requested investigation to the condition of patients before they reach hospital so that it takes account of a number of occurrences in Coventry during the recess? Ambulance services are deteriorating because of the insufficient number of vehicles and crews. One person waited 50 minutes for an ambulance from Solihull because one was not available in Coventry. After suffering a heart attack, that person died before the ambulance could reach him. That was not an isolated incident in the past three or four weeks. What will the Secretary of State do to provide more money for crews and vehicles in Coventry?

Mr. Fowler: I shall certainly examine the individual case that the hon. Gentleman has raised. Obviously, from what he said, it is a serious issue. I am satisfied that the West Midlands ambulance service is working effectively. Only recently I had the opportunity to see just that.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend considers genuine complaints against the National Health Service, will he also bear in mind the thousands of individuals who receive splendid treatment from the National Health Service, myself included? Will he bear in mind the high standard of professionalism, integrity and dedication of the staff of Ninewells hospital? It is largely through their efforts that I am here today.

Mr. Fowler: I am sure that the whole House is pleased to see my hon. Friend restored and returned to this place. He is right. All the opinion polls of those who have experience of the Health Service show that people are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service that they receive.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Given that there is generally a high level of satisfaction with the treatment that people receive when they arrive for the appropriate care, will the Secretary of State comment on the problem that arises when people have to wait for treatment by specialists involved with both the private and the National Health Service sectors? Prospective patients are told that if they pay they can be seen more quickly. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that causes great distress to many people?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, but that is not remotely the general position. Of course, we can have a debate about the situation in both the private and public sectors. As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman's party supports the concept of a private sector. I do not find that the types of complaint he is making are remotely typical of the Health Service.

Mr. Speller: I should like to take my right hon. Friend back to the first question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and stress that my hon. Friend is not alone in pointing out the problems of that hospital in Boscombe. Mr. Thomas, the father of one of my constituents, died there in September last year. No satisfaction or information has been obtainable through community health councils or the hospital. Is my right hon. Friend replying to my letter of 6 December to his office? May I associate myself with any meeting held with the Minister for Health as suggested by my right hon. Friend?

Mr. Fowler: I believe that a reply will be sent to my hon. Friend in the next 24 hours. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will be delighted to see my hon. Friend in the deputation.

Sick Pay

2. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services from which organisations representations were received asking him to simplify the payment of statutory sick pay.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Lyell): Representations have been received from both sides of industry for changes and simplification of the statutory sick pay scheme. They include among employers' organisations the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, the Pay-roll Alliance and the Association of Independent Businesses, and for employees' and consumer organisations, the TUC, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Disability Alliance.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the real reason for cutting out the middle rate of statutory sick pay not simplification, as the Minister said, but savings of £19 million, which yet again have been made at the expense of the sick?

Mr. Lyell: No. Eighty-five per cent. will receive the standard, which is the higher rate. It does not make sense to have two rates. It is true that there are savings of £19 million—against a background of nearly £750 million—but they will not all be at the expense of the sick because, as the hon. Lady knows, a very high proportion belong to occupational schemes.

Mrs. Beckett: Surely my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) is correct. What the Minister has said today is wholly contrary to what was said by his Department less than a year ago when it claimed that the system was extremely simple and was working very well. Is not the only explanation the combination of the savings and the Government's desire to placate employers by this change while at the same time introducing statutory maternity pay, which neither employers nor mothers want?

Mr. Lyell: That is not correct. The system is working well now. There have been strong requests for simplification, not just by employers. The increase in the lower rate will benefit those who receive statutory maternity pay.

North West Thames Regional Health Authority

3. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he last met the chairman of the North West Thames regional health authority; whether future capital expenditure projects for Bedfordshire were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): My right hon. Friend was able to discuss capital projects for south Bedfordshire with the chairman of the North West Thames regional health authority at the November meeting of regional chairmen. The regional health authority has provisionally identified expenditure of about £20 million in its capital programme for expenditure in south Bedfordshire.

Mr. Madel: As there has been a history of underfunding in south Bedfordshire resulting in towns like Leighton Buzzard still not having a hospital, will my hon. Friend join me in urging the North West Thames regional health authority to change its policy and increase capital expenditure to take account of recent and planned increases in population in the south of the county?

Mr. Newton: As I have told my hon. Friend, the regional health authority has acknowledged the desirability in the longer term of a community hospital at Leighton Buzzard. The authority also feels that additional development at the Luton and Dunstable hospital would be a proper precursor to that. I would hesitate to try to second guess that authority's judgment of the overall local situation.

Mr. Dobson: Will the funds that the Minister is talking about ensure that there is no recurrence of the five occasions in the past two years when hospitals in Bedfordshire have had to cease taking waiting list patients in order to cope with emergency admissions?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman asks a typically irresponsible question. He knows perfectly well that the long-standing and important emergency bed service arrangements necessarily deal with the possibility that non-emergency cases may need to be deferred when emergency cases arise. That is entirely sensible.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: While obviously not wishing to denigrate in any way any of the hospital developments in Bedfordshire, will my hon. Friend confirm that my constituents in Hemel Hempstead will not be expected to travel to Dunstable or for that matter to Northwick Park in order to get ENT services if capital developments take place in Dunstable?

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend is speaking about the possibility of a new hospital for east Hertfordshire, he will know that such a proposal is being considered by the Department.

Wrightlington Hospital

4. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce his decision on the proposed closure of the Wrightlington hospital children's ward.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Services (Mrs. Edwina Currie): Shortly, Sir.

Mr. Atkins: Does my hon. Friend recognise that this matter has been going on for a long time and that it will be looked upon as very much a test of the Government's commitment to those in particular need in and around north central Lancashire? The sooner my hon. Friend can make a decision to relieve people of their doubts and worries about the future of the hospital and the services it provides, the better.

Mrs. Currie: I recognise that, but I would rather take a little longer and get the decision right.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that this matter worries all political parties and, equally, it worries the people of north-east Lancashire, who are anxious to see that there is no detriment to the service provided in this region?

Mrs. Currie: I recognise that and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. Any decision taken will be taken entirely in the interests of the patients and particularly of the children concerned.

Heart Diseases

5. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about charges for medication for those suffering from heart diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Since 1 January 1986 we have received 12 letters from hon. Members and three letters from members of the public about prescription charges for those suffering from heart disease.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend think it is fair that if a doctor chooses to treat a cardiac patient by surgery that operation and the back-up services are completely free, while if he decided to treat it medically the prescription charges have to be paid? Surely if it is possible to argue in favour of free needles for drug abusers, it should be possible in these circumstances to give free prescriptions to cardiac patients.

Mr. Newton: I hesitate to accept the proposition that any patient suffering from a condition that might give rise to a need for an operation should automatically receive free prescriptions in advance. I also hesitate to accept the parallel that my hon. Friend seeks to draw with some experimental projects designed to find out whether we can by that means help to curb the spread of the awful disease of AIDS.

Dr. M. S. Miller: In view of all the difficulties which arise, the various groups, and the number of people who do not pay prescription charges, would it not be better to consider the possibility of eliminating such charges altogether?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that prescription charges and the charges for the season tickets raise well over £100 million a year, which is an important contribution to the NHS budget, so I do not think that I wish to go down that track.

St. James Hospital

6. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had with the Wandsworth health authority as to the possible closure of St. James hospital, Balham, SW12.

Mrs. Edwina Currie: None, Sir. The matter is still under consideration locally and has not yet come to Ministers.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware of the utter confusion now existing in Wandsworth because of the incompetence of the Wandsworth health authority in following the correct procedures on consultation and discussion in the community? Is she further aware of the complete opposition in the borough of Wandsworth, even of the Tory-controlled local authority, to the closure of St. James hospital? If public opinion is to mean anything, is it not time that the Wandsworth health authority took note of what the people of Wandsworth are saying and of their desire to keep this hospital open?

Mrs. Currie: As regards procedures, the porposal to close St. James was agreed at the district health authority meeting on 27 November. It has not yet reached the South West Thames regional health authority, which will consider it on 28 January. If the region, the district and the CHC disagree, it will come to Ministers for consideration. That is the appropriate procedure.

As regards what the Wandsworth health authority is getting up to and local approval or disapproval of it, will the local people also disapprove of the £17 million to be spent on St. George's hospital, including £800,000 for the accident and emergency departments?

Mr. Dubs: Does the Minister agree that there is enormous pressure on hospital places, both in the Wandsworth area and in south London in general, and that this, combined with the inability of the Department of Health and Social Services to predict the extra places that will be needed as a result of a likely increase in the number of AIDS patients, makes it irresponsible to consider the closure of a major hospital at this stage?

Mrs. Currie: The difficulty, as I understand it, is that St. James will need a very substantial sum of money spent on it very soon — about £12 million. The question is whether London patients are better served by spending money on an old hospital that might not suit their needs much longer or spending it on developing new and expanded services elsewhere in the same district.

Severe Weather Payments

7. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will reconsider the trigger temperature of −1·5°C for severe weather payments.

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Major): It is our firm expectation that the trigger point for severe weather payments will be reached throughout the country this week. In view of this and of the unprecedented cold weather, I wish to make it clear today that the extra payment of £5 will be made to everyone in the qualifying groups for this week. These groups are householders on supplementary benefit with someone in their family who is 65 or over, chronically sick or disabled or under two. The Government are determined that vulnerable groups should know without delay where they stand, so that they will not be discouraged from heating their homes during this very cold spell. In the unlikely event that not all the areas reach the trigger point, action will be taken to validate the payments made.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister accept — [HON. MEMBERS: "Thank him."]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister accept that there are pensioners who are literally scared to death that they will be unable to pay the bills for the fuel required to heat their homes properly? Does he not also recognise — I believe that he has in his answer — that what is required is for all pensioners to be confident that they will have sufficient money throughout the winter months to pay their bills and heat their homes properly? That is what lies behind our suggestion that all pensioners on supplementary benefit should receive £5 a week from mid-December to March to enable them to pay their bills in the winter months.

Will the Minister observe some modesty in his claims about his Government's efforts on behalf of pensioners,

bearing in mind that single pensioners, because of the break of the link between pensions, earnings and prices, have to date lost £8 a week and married pensioners £12·75?

Mr. Major: We are absolutely determined that vulnerable groups should keep warm, which is why I have made the statement that I have just made. That is why we have increased each of the three tiers of special help for heating: supplementary benefits; the heating additions, which we have extended and widened and made statutory; and, for the first time, the introduction of a statutory entitlement to a cold weather payment. Each of the three tiers of help has been increased by the Government because we are absolutely determined that the vulnerable groups shall have the confidence to keep warm in this weather. That is also why, in these special circumstances of unprecedented cold weather, I have made the announcement today, before the trigger point has been reached, so that people may have the confidence to keep warm.

Mr. Hirst: Is my hon. Friend aware that his announcement will be warmly welcomed by many of my constituents, not least those who live in outlying rural areas who frequently experience much lower temperatures than the trigger or monitoring point for Strathclyde region? While I very much welcome what he has done, can he give any hope that we can, without cumbersome buraucracy, find ways of accommodating people in outlying rural areas, who frequently experience lower temperatures?

Mr. Major: I think I demonstrated a flexibility in the last few moments that my hon. Friend might not have anticipated. We share the concern. That is why I made the statement. Since my hon. Friend's constituents will be paticularly concerned about this, I should add that it will be widely advertised over the next few days, not least, I trust, by the media, who have shown some interest in the matter.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that although what he has announced is some small relief, there are still many pensioners who are not eligible to claim it? Moreover, does not the scheme as it operates at the moment help only those with less than £500 capital and those on certain categories of supplementary benefit? Does the Minister not recognise that there are many elderly people on small incomes, not claiming supplementary benefit, but perhaps just a bit above the limit, who will not get any help? Is it not also disgraceful that from next year all heating additions are to be abolished, including even this scheme which has been triggered?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is being typically mealy-mouthed. I invite him to recollect that heating additions, which amount to over £400 million a year, have been widened and extended and made a statutory entitlement under this Government, and that during the period of Labour Governments there was no statutory entitlement to exceptionally severe cold weather payments. The winters in those days were equally cold and the hon. Gentleman's conscience is a very late arrival.

Mr. Michael Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that his news today will be welcomed, but that some of us are still concerned that the formula which is part of the system at present may cause him difficulty? Will he keep an open mind in considering the system itself in future?

Mr. Major: My mind on flexibility concerning regulations is ever open.

Mr. Wallace: of course, the Minister is right when he says that vulnerable groups should know where they stand. Is it not the case that during the last 72 hours of bitterly cold weather, until he made his announcement a few moments ago these vulnerable groups did not know where they stood? Could this not go on for several weeks throughout the winter? Are we to have the Minister coming to the Dispatch Box perhaps once a week to indicate whether in that week people will get the £5 addition? Is that not a mean amount, considering the cold that people have suffered, particularly in the remote areas where transport costs mean that the additional expenditure of this week will be far more than £5 will cover?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand the basic method of assisting vulnerable groups with heating costs. The essential assistance comes, first, in the supplementary benefit rates and, secondly, in the specific heating additions which we have extended, widened and made a regular weekly entitlement for 52 weeks of the year for vulnerable groups. That is what is expected to meet their heating bills. When the weather is unexpectedly severe, this Government, for the first time, have made available special extra help to underpin and help pay the bills that will subsequently come in. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

Mr. Cockeram: Is it not the case that the Conservative party first introduced this payment and that therefore by their bleatings the Labour party is shedding mere crocodile tears, otherwise it would have taken steps when it had the power to do so?

Mr. Major: I think that the main concern of my hon. Friend and of everyone on the Conservative Benches is to ensure that the elderly and the vulnerable are protected by having adequate heating. My hon. Friend has made a perfectly fair and valid political point. We have acted to help with heating costs. When the Labour party was in power, it did not do so.

Mr. James Lamond: Now that the Minister has been forced by the sheer logic of events to jettison one of the main regulations with regard to the heating allowance, is it not sensible that he should look at the other petty regulations that were outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) in relation to the amount of capital a recipient can have in the bank, money probably set aside for the recipient's funeral?

Can the Minister not find a better location for the taking of temperatures than those that have been allocated? For example, in my constituency people have been suffering as a result of snowfalls for a considerable time, while the temperature at Manchester airport is the figure that is taken to trigger the extra allowance.

Mr. Major: I have not jettisoned the regulations. I have told the House that I expect that the regulations will be triggered and, to avoid uncertainty about vulnerable groups, I have made the statement at a very early stage. In relation to the hon. Gentleman's point about the £500 qualifying capital limit, that is not novel to this benefit. I remind him that during the period of the Labour Government the figure was £200, and that only at the very end of their term in office was it £300.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The measure announced by my hon. Friend is to be welcomed. In addition, will he give attention to home improvement, and in particular home insulation? On the face of it, he is subsiding heat loss through uninsulated roofs and pipes. In a quieter moment, will he get together with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and work out a scheme to replace the revenue lost with longer-term capital improvements?

Mr. Major: Such discussions are already in hand. My hon. Friend gives me an adequate and welcome opportunity to mention and praise the work of the neighbourhood energy action groups, which have provided 360 local home insulation projects, 6,000 voluntary workers and a substantial amount of insulation for the homes of people who are especially needy. People who may perhaps need information about that may call the free telephone number 0800 234 8000.

Mr. Meacher: Does not the Minister's statement show that the trigger of minus 1·5 deg C was wrongly set at an absurdly low figure? Why is he not withdrawing the scheme altogether? Is he aware that payment of £5 for one week only in no way comes near to meeting need after the worst January weather on record? Is he further aware that if pensions had been increased in line with earnings, as they were under the previous Labour Government, the single pension today would be £8 a week higher and the married pension £12 a week higher, and there would be no need for bureaucratic and cumbersome schemes such as this, which are first on and then off, because of their sheer inhumanity? Will he say that he will pay £5 a week automatically, as of right, for every week during this winter, as the Labour party proposes?

Mr. Major: My statement reveals precisely what I have said, that I expect that a trigger point will be reached this week and people may now plan in that confident expectation. I will review the position again at the beginning of next week. With regard to the hon. Gentleman's other remarks, he may say what he likes about previous pension provision. He should bear in mind that if he continues to promote programmes to spend something like £28 billion a year while raising £3·6 billion through taxation, he will not meet those programmes.

Mr. Kennedy: I welcome the Minister's sensible announcement, which is the right announcement to make. However, as this entire scheme has become something of an annual shambles, will he consider two factors? First, will he consider changing the trigger degree to zero rather than minus 1·5 deg C? Secondly, instead of having to make special statements such as the one he has made today, will he make automatic payment to all those in the qualifying categories so that people do not have to make special application?

Mr. Major: There is already automatic payment for assistance with heating. It is the heating additions to which I have made frequent reference in the past. I make no secret of the fact that there have been difficulties with the discretionary scheme. It was precisely for that reason that we made it a statutory entitlement.

Hospitals (Non-admission)

8. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases have occurred in the last 12 months for which figures are available of patients in acute pain being refused admittance to National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Newton: It is for the responsible doctor to decide whether, in his clinical judgment, a patient needs to be admitted to hospital. Statistics are not kept on patients who, in the doctor's clinical judgment, do not require admission, but 50 per cent. of patients judged to need admission are admitted immediately.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister not understand that that is a pathetic failure to answer a perfectly reasonable question? Is it not right to say that there are hundreds of thousands of people who are awaiting treatment in our hospitals—8,000 of whom in Leicestershire are awaiting in-patient treatment and 15,000 awaiting out-patient treatment—and that the Government are proposing to allocate only £50 million, spread over two years, to meet this need? That is an election gimmick. What do the Government intend to do to provide adequate hospital treatment for people who are in acute need?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. and learned Gentleman looks at my answer, he will see that it was a perfectly sensible answer to his rather obscure question. On his basic point, the £50 million waiting list fund—from which I hope it will be possible to provide some help to the Leicestershire district health authority, but that will depend on our discussions with the region—will be in support of the effective efforts that authorities are already making; for example, their plans to bring additional theatres into use.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are many people who suffer acute pain for many years, whether it be from varicose veins or other problems, who would be better served if money were spent on helping them instead of it being spent on much of the transplant surgery of today, in which surgeons are more inclined to be concerned with their own reputations and macho image? Would it not be better for that money to be spent helping those who are in pain rather than just upon transplant surgery? Should there not be a separate budget instead of money often being wasted on improving surgeons' reputations?

Mr. Newton: One of the difficulties that faces all Health Ministers is that of drawing a balance in all health authorities between the different considerations to which my hon. Friend has referred.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister agree that doctors are there to treat patients; in particular, patients who are in acute pain? Will he stop the practice whereby doctors spend a considerable proportion of their time, not on treating the sick, but on telephoning other National Health Service hospitals to find out whether they can admit their patients?

Mr. Newton: I have already said that we regard it as important to reduce waiting lists and times. I believe that there are both administrative and other actions that can help towards that end, which we are trying to encourage.

Hospital Waiting Lists

9. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps the Government have taken to help ease hospital waiting lists.

14. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any new plans to reduce hospital waiting lists.

18. **Mr. McCrindle** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress in the reduction of hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Fowler: Health authorities share the Government's commitment to make further substantial improvements in waiting lists and times. They have developed and are now implementing urgent programmes of action. They will be greatly helped in this by the £50 million waiting list fund.

Mrs. Roe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he recognise that one of the features of medical treatment in the National Health Service that causes the greatest irritation to patients is the length of time that they often have to wait in doctors' surgeries? Has any review of practices within the National Health Service included advice to help to overcome this problem?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, there is irritation, although my impression is that in recent years, the position has improved quite substantially. However, waiting time is certainly one of the problems that we want to deal with.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister appreciate that, due to the present weather conditions, there will be severe pressure on hospital services? Does he further appreciate that in certain areas this pressure now extends into spring and mid-autumn—Mid Glamorgan is a case in point? Does the Minister recognise that, ultimately, it is a matter of inadequate funding? It is becoming more apparent every day that the NHS is not safe in the hands of this Government?

Mr. Fowler: I do not remotely accept that. The fact is that under this Government more patients—in-patients, day patients and out-patients—are being treated than at any time in the history of the Health Service. That shows the Government's commitment to the NHS.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not true that one way in which the Government have been able to reduce NHS waiting lists is by forcing health authorities to place their patients in private hospitals paid for by the NHS? If the money is available, why is it not spent on doing up Health Service buildings and ensuring that there are a sufficient number of consultants to carry out operations within the NHS?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. There have been contracts with the private sector and with voluntary hospitals since the inception of the National Health Service, and those contracts were operating under the Labour Government.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a permanent solution to the waiting lists of the East Birmingham hospital is the earliest possible commissioning of the district general hospital at Solihull?

Mr. Fowler: I think that that will make a substantial contribution to east Birmingham and Birmingham as a whole. The go-ahead for the Solihull hospital has been welcomed locally.

Mr. Pavitt: Will the Secretary of State hold an inquiry into the closure of acute beds and the effect on waiting lists? Is he aware that one of the quickest ways of securing savings in this fiscal year is to close acute beds? All the hospitals of North-West Thames authority have been engaged in this process. Will he examine this?

Mr. Fowler: No, Sir, I will not hold an inquiry. The fact is that between 1974 and 1979 the average number of available beds fell by some 7,000 a year, but now, under this Government, that fall, on average, is about 6,000 a year. On the basis of the measures quoted by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), the position was considerably worse under the Labour Government.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the lengths of orthopaedic waiting lists are especially worrying? Therefore, will he have a special word with the profession, in particular the consultants, to ensure that they fully honour their commitment to the NHS? That would reduce orthopaedic waiting lists. Certainly in the Macclesfield area the list is unacceptably high at present.

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend is substantially right in what he has said about the worrying nature of those waiting lists. I believe that our consultants are certainly committed in wanting to reduce waiting lists. I further believe that the new initiative, the £50 million waiting list fund, will make a further contribution to reducing those lists.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Secretary of State aware that the cut of 36,000 NHS beds under this Government has already caused a substantial lengthening of waiting lists and leaves no reserve for absorbing the influx of elderly people because of the extreme cold at this time of the year? Is the Secretary of State aware that hospitals in London and the south-east are already turning away serious operation cases because they cannot cope with the number of elderly people being admitted with hypothermia, broncho-pneumonia, heart attacks or strokes? Does he realise that, because of the Government's policy of cuts, it now means that the NHS simply cannot cope with epidemics or health crises such as the present one?

Mr. Fowler: I do not accept anything of what the hon. Gentleman has just said. It is a well-known fact that the closure of beds went on at a far faster pace under the Labour Government than under this Government. The Labour Government closed a record number of beds per year. Under that Government the NHS treated fewer patients, and when they handed over to us the NHS had the biggest and longest waiting list in its history.

Trent Regional Health Authority

10. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the funding of the Trent regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We have received many representations about the funding of the Trent regional health authority. Trent is one of the regions that has received priority for funds, and I am glad to tell the House that this year—1987-88 — it will be receiving £926 million, which represents a very substantial increase indeed.

Mr. Flannery: If one takes the resource allocation working party target as being 100 per cent., which is what it always is, is it not a fact that the Trent regional health authority is the lowest-funded authority in the United Kingdom, and that many regional health authorities in the

south receive as much as 12 per cent. more and as much as 8 per cent. above the target? That means that the great city of Sheffield falls below that target of 100 per cent. by at least £6 million. As a result, hospital waiting lists throughout the area, which the Minister herself lives in, are increasing because of under-funding. She should be fighting for more money to help the situation.

Mrs. Currie: On the contrary, the amount of money allocated to Sheffield has increased from £122 million to £153 million, and waiting lists in the area are being tackled very effectively, with a number of new sessions and consultants. I am satisfied that Sheffield is getting what it should get this year and is making very good use of that money.

PRIME MINISTER

Sir Richard Armstrong—Mr. Chapman Pincher (Correspondence)

Q1. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library a copy of all correspondence conducted on her behalf between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Chapman Pincher.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): It remains inappropriate to comment on matters in issue in the Peter Wright case in Australia. I also intend to follow the precedent set by previous Governments of not commenting on security matters.

Mr. Dalyell: By what method did a Government agency first obtain the page proofs of "Their Trade is Treachery"? This is not exactly related to the current case.

The Prime Minister: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is covered by my first reply.

Mr. Adley: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for constantly parading his political obsessions before us? Does she agree that they may account for the current standing in public opinion of the Labour party and its leader?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful for the fact that I am not responsible for the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Benn: Now that the Cabinet documents for 1956 have been published and are, therefore, no longer covered by any matter relating to immediate security, and now that it is clear that there was collusion then with the Israeli Government, and that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not an open question. The question on the Order Paper is specifically about correspondence conducted between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Chapman Pincher.

Mr. Benn: But with great respect, Mr. Speaker, one of the points referred to by Mr. Peter Wright in the book that is being suppressed is the attempt by MI6 to assassinate Colonel Nasser.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Snape** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Snape: Will the Prime Minister find time today to initiate a proper and long-term review of severe weather payments? Will she look, in particular, at the £500 limit? Does she favour thrift, or does she not?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, severe weather payments were brought in under this Government. They are paid on top of the heating addition allowance, which amounts to some £400 million a year, compared with £90 million under the previous Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman will also be aware of the statement made earlier today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security:

> "It is our firm expectation that the trigger point for severe weather payments will be reached throughout the country this week. In view of this and of the unprecedented cold weather, I wish to make it clear today that the extra payment of £5 will be made to everyone in the qualifying groups for this week."

I find it encouraging that even Labour Members expect and receive a much higher standard of heating benefit for the elderly from a Conservative Government than they ever got from a Labour Government.

Mr. Hind: Will my right hon. Friend take time during the course of her busy day to look at much of the press comment about the takeover bid by BTR for Pilkington? Will she bear in mind, especially in the light of the arguments about the north-south divide, the importance of Pilkington to the north-west region and have words today with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and urge him to refer that takeover bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend said, that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who must wait to receive advice from the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Kinnock: The announcement by the Minister earlier today on severe weather payments was welcome, but an admission of the—*[Interruption.]* We are glad to get anything we can for old people who are cold. The announcement was welcome, but was an admission of the utter incompetence of the present system offered by the Prime Minister. Does she recognise that that is a hopelessly inadequate way of trying to remove the gross deficiencies of a pathetically bad system and one recognised as such by organisations representing old people as well as by the old themselves? Must we wait for weekly announcements from Ministers so that the old and the cold can live without fear of freezing? Why does the Prime Minister not scrap the present absurdly bureaucratic and inadequate system and introduce one that provides secure and consistent help to those most in need and which responds to the realities of age, cold, and a deep fear of paying bills?

The Prime Minister: First, there was no system of severe weather payments under the Labour Government. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman expects a better standard of care from Conservative Governments than his own could possibly have given.

Secondly, the present system was referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee, which gave general support to the main elements of our proposals. It said:

"The proposals submitted to us represent a significant improvement on the previous scheme for exceptionally severe weather payments, in terms of simplicity, comprehensibility and certainty of payment."

Thirdly, when we have a totally unprecedented level of low temperatures of the sort that we have experienced recently, which were lower than ever before except in 1940, we are indeed anxious, and will waive the strict bureaucratic procedures in order—*[Interruption.]* That is precisely what my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Hon. Members do not wish to hear the truth of what has happened. Yes, we were anxious to waive the bureaucracy. As my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"I wish to make it clear today that the extra payment of £5 will be made to everyone in the qualifying groups for this week . . . The Government are determined that vulnerable groups should know without delay where they stand, so that they will not be discouraged from heating their homes during this very cold spell."

That is an excellent record and an excellent decision.

Mr. Kinnock: The people at risk, of whom there are many thousands, do not want a distorted history lesson from the Prime Minister. They want help with their heating and all her recitations from Committee minutes do not fill any bellies or warm any homes. Will the Prime Minister answer my question? Are we to wait for weekly announcements of adjustments in an incompetent policy, or will she get rid of her stupid system?

The Prime Minister: I have two further points in reply to the right hon. Gentleman. The last time that we had extremely severe weather was in 1978-79, and the heating additions then were £90 million. Today they are £400 million. At that time the Labour Government were in office and not one right hon. or hon. Gentleman raised the matter at Question Time with his own Government. Furthermore, may I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the other danger to the elderly of having insufficient heat was during the coal strike, which he supported.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister now—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: Now, Mr. Prime Minister—*[Laughter.]* I am anticipating events. Will the Prime Minister now answer the question? Must we wait for a weekly announcement, or will the right hon. Lady help old people directly and consistently? Does she not recall that last year she defended that incompetent system? This year she is defending this mess. How many additional old people must die before she changes her policy?

The Prime Minister: The comparison is as follows: under the Labour Government £90 million—*[Interruption.]* I shall say what is happening now. *[Interruption.]* Obviously, the right hon. Gentleman does not want me to make the comparison. The comparison is heating additions of £90 million a year under a Labour Government with £400 million a year under this Conservative Government; no severe weather payments under that Labour Government, with generous severe weather payments under this Government, with arrangements that have just been modified to ensure that pensioners receive it; and the coal strike under Labour that deprived old people of heat, and resistance to that from a Tory Government.

York

Q3. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to York,.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend praise the railway work force in York, which has achieved, both on the administrative and the engineering sides, such solid benefits? Furthermore, will she confirm that under the Conservative Government, in real terms, a great deal more investment is going into the railways, amounting to more than £414 million per annum, compared with a derisory £343·5 million per annum under Labour?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Government have fully recognised the importance of the railways and since we took office British Rail has invested a total of £3 billion in modernising the railways. We are now seeing the largest ever programme for new trains. In the past three years the Government have approved nearly £1 billion of investment in major railway projects, such as the east coast main line electrification scheme. It is for those in this country to compete for new orders, and it is for British Rail to decide where the contracts are given.

Q4. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 January.

Engagements

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cartwright: Does the Prime Minister agree that in the present appalling weather we should be concerned, not only about the elderly, but about the growing number of homeless young people, of whom there are literally hundreds living rough in London alone, with council housing and private rented housing denied to them? What hope can the Government give to that growing band of homeless youngsters?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there are a large number of council houses vacant, including some in London. Some have been vacant for over a year and one would hope that they will soon be used to house those who need them. There are legislative provisions for dealing with homelessness which bear on the duties of local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will my right hon. Friend find time in her busy day to congratulate Crosfield Electronics in my constituency on having trebled its turnover from £60 million to nearly £200 million in three years, breaking into Japan with about 35 per cent. of the market, and having 35 per cent. of the European market and 35 per cent. of the American market, won against local competition, for computer-aided technology? Is that not a great achievement?

The Prime Minister: I know the factory to which my hon. Friend refers. I visited it about a year ago, when my hon. Friend was present. It is an impressive firm with extremely impressive achievements which have been of great benefit to its people and to the whole of Britain. I congratulate the company and wish it well in the future.

Mr. Steel: Further to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), will the Prime Minister recognise that the charity Crisis at Christmas had a record number of young homeless to deal with this Christmas at its soup kitchens and shelters? If, as the right hon. Lady says, there is housing available in London, will she take the time to go and look at the cardboard city on the south bank, and will she ask her Ministers to take action on the issue, which is a growing scandal?

The Prime Minister: I join the right hon. Gentleman in congratulating the charity Crisis at Christmas, which is helped by an enormous number of people. It ran a very impressive and helpful operation which brought joy to many people. In London about 28,000 homes are empty and 10,000 of them are vacant for more than a year. That has been a problem for several years and from time to time I read out the number of empty houses. Some of them are being done up for new tenants; others seem to have been empty for a very long time.

Mr. Kinnock: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is imperative that the House has the opportunity to debate the subject of severe weather payments, because thousands of people, including the constitiuents of Conservative Members, are at risk and are desperate to be able to maintain heating in their homes. *[Interruption.]* There is a crisis of cold in Britain that affects many old and poor people and it is not changed by the announcement that we have heard this afternoon. *[Interruption.]* This House must attend to that subject and I therefore want to inform you, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I may have lost my voice, but I want to be able to hear what is being said.

Mr. Kinnock: For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I want to inform you that tomorrow the Opposition intend to devote the whole of their Opposition day to debates on the condition of the old and the cold, and the problem of fuel poverty, which will endure much longer than the validity of today's announcement and still leave a basic crisis of poverty and loneliness to be answered. We shall, of course, return quickly to the failure of the Government's eonomic policies. However, anyone who knows of the fear which is now gripping so many thousands of our old people in this country must recognise the primacy of this issue for consideration by this House.

Mr. Biffen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In many parts of the House there will be an appreciation of the topicality of the subject that has been chosen for tomorrow. I should like also to thank the right hon. Gentleman for the indication that there will be a debate on the economy because this House, especially Conservative Members, have a vested interest in that subject being debated as early as possible and in as much depth as possible. Therefore, I undertake to do my best to see that a day is made available.

Mr. Frank Cook: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I simply ask you to contrast the reception that was given to the Leader of the House as against that given to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Conway: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not the fact that the Leader of the Opposition simply wants to run away from the economic debate, and should not the House be aware that on 2 December the Opposition were not even here for the debate. — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I raise the fact that this morning the Bracknell Met Office refused to give information about temperatures, on the ground that such information was politically contentious? I understand that the DHSS has a contract with the Met service about supplying information on temperatures. I am sure that you would be concerned as much as we would be if there were to be any suggestion that the DHSS has leant on the Met service to withhold information about temperatures. As it seems from the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot see that what goes on at the Bracknell Met Office is anything to do with me. It is a matter that could quite legitmately, and perhaps even should, be mentioned in the debate tomorrow.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Member representing Bracknell and the Met Office, I know that a large number of my constituents who serve at the Met Office would deeply resent the remarks that have just been made by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and I ask him to withdraw them.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We all accept that what the Leader of the Opposition had to say was about an important subject. However, if the House is to be run in a civilised and proper way, a point of order has to be either a proper point of order or it is nothing. It is either a personal statement or a request. What the Leader of the Opposition said was surely not a point of order, in the widest use of the words. Is this House to be run properly or for the use of the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: Order. As far as I am aware, no subject for tomorrow's debate had been announced in the House, and I think that it was for the general convenience of the House, as the Leader of the House indicated, to know exactly what the subject tomorrow is to be.

Mr. Hoyle: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it not have been better for the Minister, in making his announcement on severe weather payments, instead of relying on a fortuitous question from an Opposition Member, to have made the statement at the end of questions? That would have been fairer to you, Mr. Speaker, and would have allowed all hon. Members with an interest in the elderly to make a contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are matters that should legitimately be raised tomorrow in the debate, which I now understand is to last a full day. If the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) is fortunate, he can raise that point then.

Mr. Dykes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Because of your loss of voice, I am sorry to ask you to guide the House further. Manifestly, the comment of the Leader of the Opposition was not a point of order. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry to go on, but this is an important point to do with defending the interests of the House. Having an altercation with people outside Indian restaurants is one thing, but obviously for the Leader of the Opposition having an altercation with the Prime Minister is much more difficult. We understand that.

However, he should not use a bogus point of order as an excuse to continue a debate. Since the Opposition's humbug on this issue has been shown as a result of the Government's announcement, should not a change of business be announced through the usual channels by the Leader of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me clear this matter. Before we adjourned for the Christmas recess, no subject for the Opposition day had been announced. As far as I am aware, since I do not receive party Whips, no subject has yet been announced. I think that it was for the general convenience of the House to know — *[Interruption.]* Order. The House has to know in some way or another. The only way in which it can be told is if the subject is announced by a member of the Opposition. It was perfectly legitimate to do that.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In order to try to clarify the issue, is it not a fact that during this Session and the previous Session the Leader of the House, on more than one occasion, has introduced a business statement under the guise of a point of order and it has been accepted by you?

We have all noticed that your voice is breaking, Mr. Speaker. You sound like the House of Commons' answer to Aled Jones. If this turns into any form of acute pain, will you assure the House that you will use a National Health Service hospital and not follow the Prime Minister and use a private one?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his concern about my health. However, my eyesight is fine, my hearing is fine and my memory is very good.

Mr. Dickens: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you opened the proceedings this afternoon you said something similar to what you have just repeated—that you had trouble with your voice, but that your eyes were sharp. May we all be assured that you have had a good look at those who have taken advantage of your voice this afternoon?

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have dealt with one point of order from the hon. Gentleman. If he has another, I shall take it, but not if it deals with the same subject.

Mr. Madden: The Library cannot advise me who is ministerially responsible for the Met Office. If we wish to obtain information about temperatures, will the Table Office accept questions that the Met Office in Bracknell is apparently refusing to answer if they are made to the Department of the Environment, which is the Met Office's best guess as to who is the Minister responsible?

Mr. Speaker: I suggest that the hon. Member tries that out on the Table Office. I am sure that he will be given good advice.

Rate Support Grant

3.41 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the rate support grant settlement for 1987-88 and selective rate limitation for local authorities in England.

When I made my announcement about relevant and total expenditure on 16 December, I said that no further rate support grant reports could be made until validating legislation had been approved by Parliament to allow decisions to be taken in line with the practice which had hitherto been adopted. I also said that I would make a further announcement about rate support grant when the House returned in January. I am today announcing my firm intentions for the 1987-88 settlement for England and for the supplementary reports for 1986-87 and 1985-86. These intentions are based on the powers I am taking in the Local Government Finance Bill. Copies of the explanatory material and the rate limits proposed in that Bill are being sent to local authorities today and are available in the Library and the Vote Office. Authorities will be able to plan their budgets and rates for 1987-88 with confidence. I shall make the relevant reports, and designated authorities will be notified of their rate and precept limits immediately the Local Government Finance Bill receives Royal Assent.

The consultation which has preceded the 1987-88 settlement has been much more extensive than in previous years. I have considered very carefully the comments which the local authority associations have made to me, and the many representations received from individual local authorities. I do not intend to make any major changes to my proposals of 3 December.

I deal first with the main features of the 1987-88 settlement. Since 3 December I have received further information on capital allocations for 1987-88 and about some authorities' budgets for 1986-87. This information has been taken into account in the figures I am announcing today. The figures also take into account expected higher spending by some rate and precept limited authorities to reflect the provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill. The consequence of these changes is to increase slightly the grant entitlements of most local authorities.

The aggregate of Exchequer grant to authorities will be set at the level I announced in July, £12,842 million, which is an increase of over £1 billion or 9 per cent. over the level included in the settlement for the current financial year.

My estimate of aggregate total expenditure in 1987-88 is £24,703 million. Provision for local authority current expenditure will be set at £25,251 million; this is 13 per cent. more than at settlement last year and £40 million higher than previously proposed to take account of the later information. In addition, the Government will, as the House knows, make available additional provision and grant when there is a settlement on teachers' pay which meets our requirements on cost, pay structure, and duties.

There are plenty of opportunities for authorities to reduce their expenditure, for example, by putting out services to competitive tendering or by implementing the many savings identified by the Audit Commission. I intend therefore that the aggregate of authorities' grant-related expenditure assessments should not be uplifted by the full increase in expenditure provision but should be held broadly steady in real terms.

I intend to specify the same principles for GREs as were proposed in the 3 December consultation paper. The most significant change from 1986-87 is that the police GRE will be distributed on the basis of police establishments.

I intend that the slope of the grant-related poundage schedule will stay the same as this year. This will provide an incentive for authorities to restrain their expenditure.

As usual there will be arrangements to limit the impact of year-on-year changes on individual authorities grant entitlements. It is my intention that there should be a limit on block grant losses of 7p at ratepayer level and a limit of 12p on gains.

In July, I announced my intention to introduce legislation which would provide local authorities with greater certainty about their grant entitlement. A Bill will be introduced shortly to abolish the arrangements known as grant recycling whereby grant not claimed is redistributed to all authorities. In future, an authority's grant will depend on its own expenditure and not on the expenditure of all other authorities. At the same time, the abolition of grant recycling will mean a tougher regime for high spending authorities which will no longer receive a paradoxical and unconvenanted benefit through recycling.

Local authorities can claim the full amount of grant if they spend in line with the settlement spending assumption. We have increased the amount of Exchequer grant by over £1 billion for next year, and authorities have a very clear choice about whether to be prudent and claim their entitlement or to spend up and lose grant.

I shall make the third supplementary report for 1985-86 and the first supplementary report for 1986-87 when I make the main rate support grant report. It is my intention that the supplementary report for 1985-86 will adjust grant to take account of provisional outturn expenditure and certain changes in education pool contributions. Most authorities have brought their spending closer to target, and as a result £385 million of grant so far withheld for 1985-86 will be paid out. The supplementary report for 1986-87 will distribute the block grant underclaim of some £618 million consequent upon the estimates of total expenditure received from authorities on or before 19 December. My predecessor guaranteed that at least £500 million of grant would be recycled in the first supplementary report for 1986-87. This report will therefore honour that guarantee.

I now turn to the authorities selected for rate limitation in 1987-88. The House will know, from my statement on 16 December and from yesterday's debate on the Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill, that rate limitation is to be dealt with — for 1987-88 only — in accordance with the terms of the proposed legislation.

The Department is today writing to the 20 high-spending authorities selected for rate limitation, informing them individually of the rate limit figure which flows from the Local Government Finance Bill and my intention for rate support grant. Each of those councils will therefore be able to set its rate in good time before 1 April, within the figure being notified to it.

In the case of the 20 joint authorities which are automatically selected for precept limitation under the Local Government Act 1985, Departments with responsibility for those authorities will be writing to them with similar information about the precept limits produced by

[Mr. Nicholas Ridley]

the formulae in the Bill. The present system of local government finance is short on accountability and long on complexity. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Our Green Paper proposals will replace it. While the present system lasts, I commend this settlement to the House as the best that can be achieved. Prudent and responsible local authorities which contain their expenditure can keep rate increases low. The Government are providing more than an extra £1 billion in grant. How much rates will rise is for the local authorities; they have the opportunity to keep the rates low this year. If authorities choose to spend high, it will be their fault that the rates go up. In the profligate high-spending authorities, ratepayers will benefit considerably from the important protections provided by rate limitation.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Secretary of State made a long and complicated statement, but I can begin—as can all my right hon. and hon. Friends—by joining him in his condemnation of the present rate support grant system — a system that is solely the creation of the Government and all those hon. Members who said, "Hear, hear" to the Secretary of State's comments. They voted for the system and have supported it since its creation.

Is the Secretary of State aware that, because of the Government's incompetence, major problems and uncertainties for all local authorities result from the especially late statement that he has made on rate support grant? There will be particular difficulties for those authorities snared by the Rates Act 1984. Is he aware also that, in his treatment of those authorities, there is no natural justice and a denial of the promises made to the House by the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), not only in piloting the legislation through the House, but in subsequent letters to local authorities and to me as the shadow Environment Secretary? What has the right hon. Gentleman to say to the House about that matter?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Local Government Finance Bill, which was given a Second Reading yesterday, is complex and difficult? In his statement, he assumed that the Bill will go through the House and, more important perhaps, through another place without a single change or amendment being made to it. Is that not a breathtakingly arrogant assumption to make, given the nature of the legislation?

Will the Secretary of State recognise that his decision to maintain grant at 46 per cent. of expenditure shows the beginnings of recognition by the Government of the validity of local government spending? Why has it taken seven years for this recognition to arrive on the Treasury Bench, especially since, in those seven years, cuts of £17·5 billion have been made in rate support grant? Why does the right hon. Gentleman seek to disguise the end of grant recycling and its implications? Is he not aware that Mr. Brian Tanner, the county treasurer of Somerset, has forecast that the end of grant recycling will reduce his often-mentioned extra £1 billion by at least £400 million? Is he aware that many other people in local government view the reduction as likely to be more than half the extra money he boasts about? Is he not seeking to disguise that fact because the Treasury plans to recoup at least half the extra money he claims to provide to local authorities?

Why has the Secretary of State changed the claim he made to the House last July that there would be no need for any rates increase as a result of his rate support grant settlement? In the final part of his statement, did he not recognise that rates increases will not only occur but be inevitable as a result of the Government's policies? When will the right hon. Gentleman publish the Bill to end grant recycling? With what other matters will that legislation deal?

Will the Secretary of State explain why he claims that these latest proposals, which he said resulted only from consideration of new and more relevant information and data, disguise the fact that he is reallocating more money as a result of his manipulation of the safety nets and multipliers than he is as a result of any consideration of any new information? The reality is that more than twice as much of the money reallocated results from the manipulation of the multipliers as could be attributed to any new information.

Is the Secretary of State aware that we condemn his ever-widening use of the Rates Act, this time applying to more local authorities and bodies than ever before—40 in total? Do his figures for rate limits take into account the bombshell announced in December in which calculations of housing subsidy for maintenance of council houses were changed, thus denying inner city boroughs, such as Camden, Islington and Brent, of many millions of pounds for crucial house maintenance and repair? Given the difficulties that result not only from the statement's complexity and lateness but from the widening use of the Rates Act, why has not the Secretary of State been more open about the Government's intentions on teachers' pay? Is it not a reality that, if settlement of that matter comes after local authorities have fixed their rates, they will face grave difficulties? Since the right hon. Gentleman has commented on the Government's resolve to protect ratepayers, will he say why last year's public expenditure White Paper did not take realistic account of the level of local government expenditure? Will tomorrow's be any more realistic?

Finally—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is always a mistake to say "finally", even when one's comments are significantly shorter than those of the Secretary of State. Does not the Secretary of State recognise that the real reason why rates are and remain a problem for people is the failure of the Government's policies, the massive switching of burdens from taxpayers to ratepayers, and the Government's ineptitude in dealing with local government finance?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has asked many questions, and I shall try to answer them briefly. I am delighted to hear his support for changing this system getting stronger and stronger. We shall expect him to be with us in the Division Lobby when the Bill to abolish rates in England and Wales is introduced shortly after the election. He will then be able to reflect his dislike of the system in his vote.

The consultation on this settlement has been greater than on any previous occasion. *[Laughter.]* That is not a bad thing or something to be laughed at. If we have consultation, it is right that we should listen to all hon. Gentlemen's comments and, if necessary, act on them. I think that many hon. Members will be grateful for the fact that I did that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about rate limits. Consultation on rate limits had already taken place when authorities that wished to apply for redetermination saw officials or Ministers and, after consideration of those representations, the formulae in the Bill were inserted. Had it not been for the Bill having to be brought forward, I should now be making a final determination, having consulted those rate-limited authorities that applied for redetermination, which were not all of them. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that it would be different. That is right, but for many of them it is higher than it would have been because, as he knows, we have had to keep them all to the same increase in each class. That means that some of them have got higher rate limits than they might otherwise have received. That is borne out by the figure in my statement of an extra £40 million provision. Because of rate capping and precept limitation, the figure is actually £50 million less a £10 million adjustment for authorities spending less this year than they expected.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the change in the GRE in relation to the treatment of rent in London. This change was made at the suggestion of the Association of London Authorities, and for that reason I cannot understand why he should complain about it.

The hon. Gentleman asked why I assumed that the Bill would go through. If the Bill does not go through, no rate support grant will be payable next year, nor will it be possible to pay back the £385 million of holdback that is due to be paid back under the 1985-86 report. That is held up until the Bill becomes law. Massive sums of money for local authorities are at stake under the Bill and I would not have thought that any Member of either House would wish to obstruct progress of the Bill because of the geat damage to local authorities which would result if that money could not be paid.

We would never have produced more than an extra £1 billion of rate support grant if it had not been proposed to abolish grant recycling. The two go together and I hope that not one penny of that money comes back. I hope that every authority will spend at the level of the settlement assumption and not above it. Even that, at 5·25 per cent. above this year's cost—that is, 1·5 per cent. more than inflation—is a very large increase in spending.

The hon. Gentleman asked about rates. If all authorities spend at the settlement assumption, then the average—I repeat average—percentage increase in rate precepts will be 1·2 per cent. which is much less than the rate of inflation. If authorities spend at the settlement assumption, there will be an average reduction in rate bills in real terms.

The recycling Bill will be published very soon. One small but I think uncontroversial change is necessary, but otherwise it contains only provisions to end grant recycling.

The hon. Gentleman asked about teachers' pay. The Department of Education and Science will shortly provide local authority associations with details of the cost of the settlement on teachers' pay and details of the grant towards it. Those details are based on the statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science made on 30 October. If the settlement is as my right hon. Friend predicted on 30 October, the full financial consequences will be with authorities very soon, and that will enable them to set their budgets and rates in plenty of time before the deadline.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about the public expenditure White Paper. He must wait to see that White Paper when it is published tomorrow. As with all things to do with this Government, he will find it sensible, workmanlike and realistic.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I thank the Secretary of state for listening to our representations and responding to them, and for the safety net provisions, but will he bear in mind the particular problem of Bedfordshire—the education debt provision—which has been with us for many years and is likely to continue? Will he continue to try to find a solution to that problem?

Mr. Ridley: I note what my hon. Friend says. I know that there are special difficulties in Bedfordshire. It is not one of the most fortunate areas in terms of the settlement. That is a result of the swings and roundabouts and the complexities in the rate support grant settlement, but I shall certainly bear in mind the problem about education that he mentioned.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Is it not highly reprehensible that six weeks' reflection on the previous statement by the Secretary of State has not brought any change in the highly unfair and biased allocation that he proposed then and which will benefit certain shire counties? Surely the Government's love of things American ought not to lead them to introduce the pork barrel system of politics by assisting those who might well support them at the ballot box.

Is it not also rather strange that the Secretary of State should say in his statement that it is his firm intention to carry out the 1987-88 settlement when he gives us no knowledge of the effect of the powers that he will take to himself in the Act about the accounting systems of local government and what effect that might well have on local government finances in the following year?

Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that to base the grant-related expenditure for the police on police establishments relates it to something which is at least in contention if not highly questionable in many local authorities which complain about the establishment of the police? Is it not highly sceptical to think that one can bring significant benefit from compulsion in regard to competitive tendering? That will not bring any significant savings to local government. Is it not amazing to suggest that the local government system is short on accountability and long on complexity when the truth is that it is short on accountability to local electors and certainly long on compulsion by the Government? That is the heart of the problem.

Mr. Ridley: I am amazed by the hon. Gentleman's first question, because he does not seem to know that between parts of England south and north of the Severn-Wash line about £1 billion of grant is transferred from the south to the north. He may be interested to know that this settlement gives an extra £381 million to counties and authorities north of that line, and only £148 million to counties south of the line. He talks about pork barrel politics in the Tory shire counties, but he ought to be aware that this is one of the best settlements ever reached for northern authorities and industrial cities.

I am fully aware that the settlement and the payment of grant to local authorities depends upon the Local Government Finance Bill receiving Royal Assent in a form

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very similar to the form it is in at present. The hon. Gentleman and the Opposition will have to consider carefully whether they want to take their heady opposition to the point where they might seriously risk depriving local authorities of grant on time.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the police. The West Yorkshire police authority could reduce its rate by 0·2 per cent. if it spent at the settlement assumption and the precept limit in the Bill.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend will know that many critics have suggested that the rate support grant would be geared in the direction of the south. On behalf of the people of Cleveland, I should like to thank him for his statement about the rate support grant. That county is being treated in the most generous way of all the counties and has an additional bonus because of the saving of Smith's Dock and ITM. There will be rate income from those two large organisations this year. That would otherwise have been lost. As a consequence, the people of Cleveland who now have a decent allowance will be able to look forward to a reduction in their rates.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and pleased to hear the authoritative voice of the north speaking accurately and truthfully. My hon. Friend is quite right. If Cleveland spends at the settlement assumption, it will gain a further £15 million in grant and will be able to reduce its rate by 4·1 per cent. I hope that after a few years of the operation of the new urban development corporation on Teesside the companies about which my hon. Friend spoke will create sufficient rateable value to give an extra boost to that part of the world.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Since yesterday's debate, has the Minister had time to read his Bill? If he has finally managed to read it, does he not recognise that the draconian measures that he is taking upon himself, the retrospective nature of the Bill and the clauses that will prevent the courts from being used in the way in which they have always been used in Britain will obviously not be acceptable to many noble Lords? It is unlikely that the Bill will go through without being significantly amended. Is it not therefore arrogant to make the kind of statement that he has made today on the basis of the Bill going through unamended? Is he aware that capital allocations are totally inadequate and that, for instance, in Sefton, because of this settlement, they have had to stop letting out contracts? How can the so-called party of law and order take £6 million from the Merseyside police authority when crime has increased by 40 per cent. during the lifetime of this Government?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman may have read the Bill, but he has certainly not understood it. Nor have his right hon. and hon. Friends. The elements of retrospection and judge-proofing that they alleged yesterday were totally disproved by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland who closed the debate with distinction and clarity. If he does not understand the Bill, he would do better to keep quiet on the matter. Sefton can reduce its rates by 3·3 per cent. if it spends at the settlement assumption. I cannot see what is wrong with that.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): My right hon. Friend has referred to the weaknesses in the rate support grant system—we would all agree with that—but is not one of the weaknesses that updated population figures are not used in the final settlement when they could be? Is that not unfair to counties of increasing population, such as Buckinghamshire?

Mr. Ridley: All population figures are taken into account at a certain stage. They have to work their way into the data upon which the whole operation is based. However, the effect of a cap on grant gains and making a quicker appreciation of population changes would, of course, be working in the opposite direction and would cancel each other out.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): For all the Secretary of State's talk of complexity and consultation, and for all the twists and turns of the succession of Secretaries of State, is it not a simple fact that the Government are proposing a total Exchequer grant, including that to the police, of £12·8 billion out of a total anticipated expenditure of £27·7 billion? By my calculation, that is less than 46 per cent. of total expected expenditure. That is compared with 61 per cent. which was the figure of Government support for local authorities when the Government came into office. Is that not a massive reduction in support for local government and local services?

Mr. Ridley: The total provision is not £27 billion, as the hon. Gentleman said, but some £25 billion, of which the approximately £12·8 billion rate support grant represents precisely 46·4 per cent.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is possible at one and the same time to congratulate him on maintaining the present level of support for local authorities, at least while we have the present system, to join with him in wishing that the present system could be profoundly changed and to disagree deeply with him about the present proposals to change that system?

Mr. Ridley: It is possible for my hon. Friend to do that, but only for a short while longer, before he has to tell us how he prefers to see the system changed.

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): I have a simple question for the Secretary of State. In the light of the settlement that he has announced, will there be more or less expenditure on repairs, renewal and maintenance of the building stock—housing, schools and other public buildings—in the inner city areas in particular, one of which I represent?

Mr. Ridley: With the best will in the world, it is not a simple question, because a large part of repair and maintenance is treated as current expenditure out of the rent account and a large part of this is capitalised and treated as capital expenditure. My complaint is that too much of what should have been maintenance is turned into capital dereliction because it has not been done in the past. It is impossible to give an answer related to current only. I can only say that the right hon. Gentleman will find a large increase in the capital provision for housing repair and renovation; together with this large increase in rate support grant settlement, he will find that the money available for housing, both current and capital, is greatly increased in real terms over the previous year.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend send to any Member who alleges that he understands his statement a tin of the new parliamentary humbugs? Will he send to the rest of us a clear translation, indicating how it affects our individual areas?

Mr. Ridley: I do not know whether my hon. Friend is suggesting that I should send myself a tin of humbugs. I would certainly be delighted to spend as much time as he likes with him or with any other hon. Member explaining how the system works, although there must be a time limit on that because we will soon replace the system with a better one.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Will the Secretary of State confirm that as a result of his announcement today the City of Birmingham district council, the biggest in England, will not be allowed to spend as much as it should spend according to the Government's own assessment of what needs to be spent in Birmingham?

Mr. Ridley: The settlement for Birmingham is an extra £30·861 million over the present grant if it spends at the settlement assumption, which enables Birmingham to reduce its rates by 4·8 per cent., not in real terms but in cash terms, which is the best result of any authority under this settlement. It is just a little bit greedy for Birmingham to believe that it should have more when that more can come only from the constituencies of other hon. Members.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): My right hon. Friend will be aware that if he gives more to Birmingham he will take even more from east Sussex where, in spite of an impeccable performance — by the Government's own statistics east Sussex has performed better in cutting its expenditure over the past five years than any other county —he has reduced absolutely the rate support grant. We have been told recently that this has come about for a number of reasons, among them an alteration, seemingly arbitrary, in the way in which children between the ages of 0 and 15 are calculated for the purpose of rate support grant—which does not bode well for the young people. Indeed, the absolute reduction does not bode well for any of the people in east Sussex.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend does not have too bad a result for east Sussex. He can look forward to a rate increase of only 2·5 per cent. if the county council spends at the settlement assumption. That is a better result than many hon. Gentlemen will have for their authorities. I do not think that it is too bad.

The GREs are constantly being negotiated with all authorities and their associations, and we tend to try to do what the authorities want. But the consequences of that are not always good for every authority. There is always a bit of swings and roundabouts in it. In east Sussex I am sure that we can find some GRE changes which would be to the benefit of the county. It is a pity to pick on only one rather than to look at the overall position.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Secretary of State, taking into consideration the answer that he gave to one of his hon. Friends, look at the situation which affects Barnsley metropolitan borough council? Since the census was taken in, I think, 1981, the cost of certain undertakings and the whole atmosphere and situation in Barnsley have changed. For instance, it is now 12th as regards children under 18 in care. It has the fourth highest percentage of people over the age of 75. It has the highest percentage of unemployment, which has risen by 72 per cent. compared with 32 per cent. on average. Should not consideration be given to these factors, which have changed since the census was taken?

Mr. Ridley: All those factors are taken into account in the GREs, including the population statistics of the various age groups. They are agreed with the local authority associations and we decide how best to take cognisance of them. It would be wrong, having had those data fed into the construction of the GREs, then to seek to have a special increase because it is felt that the results are not satisfactory for one's own authority.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that anything to do with rates is a minefield and that recent statements by the Government have not reduced the number of explosives. Does he agree that his most recent statement does not seem to have paid tribute to those responsible authorities, like mine in the borough of Macclesfield, which have met the successive requirements of Governments of all shades and complexions? Will he direct his remarks to capital receipts, which are of immense benefit to my authority? If that authority was able to spend them, not only would they generate additional revenue but they would reduce unemployment and make my area of the north-west more efficient, which is totally in line with the requirements of the Government.

Mr. Ridley: I hereby and without condition pay full tribute to all those authorities which are frugal, prudent, sensible and economical. I wish that we could spend more time on them instead of on some of the councils represented by the Labour party which are becoming so extraordinary that the House not only has to talk about them but has to legislate about them, to the great detriment of the good authorities. I take my hon. Friend's point entirely.

On capital receipts, the results that my hon. Friend mentions would not flow through. If we were to release a greater proportion of capital receipts, authorities would have to borrow to find the cash. So, although they could save money, as it were, in the ways he has suggested——

Mr. Winterton: It is on deposit now.

Mr. Ridley: I do not think it is. Only a very small proportion of the £8 billion of capital receipts is on deposit. The rest does not really exist because it is being used to repay debt, either external debt or internal debt.

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Can the Secretary of State explain how a county like Hampshire, which for the last seven years has followed to the letter Government diktats, should still suffer considerable grant loss? Despite the opportunities outlined in paragraph 7 of his statement, just to hold the line on the current level of service will mean a rate increase in double figures. How can the Secretary of State make such a statement about capital receipts when Portsmouth, which has over £40 million in capital receipts, is unable to spend it? Should he give the authority power to release that expenditure, it could not only bring down unemployment but greatly improve the housing position in that city.

Mr. Ridley: I am surprised by that. I understand that Alliance members on Hampshire county council recently

[Mr. Ridley]

voted against accepting the lowest tender for providing a service when it had gone out to competitive tender. How dare the hon. Gentleman make any such point?

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): In regard to the receipts from council house sales, does the problem not stem from the absurd way in which the Government treated the receipts as a reduction in public expenditure? Essentially it has been a means of financing the PSBR. It means that the Government have been borrowing from local authorities. Surely it is time we got this straightened out and enabled local authorities to have more access to the money which they have.

Mr. Ridley: The total of local authority capital indebtedness is, from memory, about £33 billion. So if £33 billion is owed by local authorities to those from whom they borrow, it would be unlikely that one would find large amounts of capital receipts in the banks or on deposit, although there are some. Therefore, I do not think it is a question of a system of accounting; it is a question of local authorities not having the money from capital receipts because they have used it to repay debts.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is not the Secretary of State aware that there is probably about £6 billion of accumulated capital receipts in local authority bank accounts all round the country? The right hon. Gentleman has not the foggiest idea of how local government finance works. Before he insults the House with his arrogant, laid-back approach, showing his total ignorance of the problems of local authorities, he should get the facts right.

Mr. Ridley: No one could call the hon. Gentleman laid back or relaxed; he seems to be working himself into a frenzy. In fact, he is wrong. There is not some £6 billion of receipts in bank accounts. Local authorities, very prudently and properly, have used their capital receipts to repay their debts.

Sir Julian Ridsdale (Harwich): Will my right hon. Friend examine again the position in Essex? Is he aware that in my constituency and in many parts of Essex many people on small fixed incomes will be adversely affected by his failure to understand the position? If Essex county council is able to keep its spending under GRE, will he reconsider the position and treat the council sympathetically?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend and other hon. Gentlemen who represent Essex constituencies have discussed this with me, but I must point out that Essex is increasing its spending and is not one of the authorities which comes entirely into the category that I commended in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). It has to be considered how the county council has allowed its spending to get out of control. Even as it is, the county council will have to make only a 6·3 increase in rates if it spends at the settlement assumption, but that assumption in the case of Essex is rather high.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Bradford is suffering the second biggest cut in grant of any metropolitan district in England? Will he also agree that, unless that cut is restored and unless the Government agree to fund properly the West Yorkshire police, fire and transport authorities, Bradford ratepayers will face a very big demand this year? Will he now reconsider the request that I made to him last August to meet representatives of Bradford council so that they may bring to his attention the unique problems and demands of the area and he can reconsider restoring the cut in grant which his statement will inflict upon the city?

Mr. Ridley: I am getting more and more to hear what the language of the Labour party is. I ask the House to listen to this; a cut for Bradford in rate support grant is an increase of £10·426 million; a cut in the West Yorkshire police authority's grant is an increase of £5·436 million; a cut in the West Yorkshire fire authority's grant is an increase of £0·229 million; a cut in the West Yorkshire tranport authority's grant is an increase of £1·778 million. How those figures can conceivably be described as a cut absolutely defeats me.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his proposals for Nottinghamshire, which at present has a Labour-controlled authority? Is it correct to say that his proposals will give that county an increase of about £22 million, or the equivalent of a 10p or 11p rate? If I am correct, is it not appalling that the county should consider any increase in its rates for next year?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The extra grant for Nottinghamshire, if it spends its settlement assumption, is £22·119 million which would enable it to cut its rates by 10·7 per cent. It is an extremely favourable result for Nottinghamshire. Whether it lies north of the Severn-Humber line I rather doubt, so it has done extremely well. I urge it publicly to show a big cut in its rate so that it can increase the confidence of business to expand and provide more jobs for the citizens of Nottingham.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that the spending of authorities governed by the second formula in schedule 2 of the Bill varies from 1·6 per cent. above GREA to 70 per cent. above GREA? Will he therefore consider in Committee amendments that would reduce those anomalies? In respect of the London borough of Newham, which cannot put up its rates further, why has he today reduced the block grant figure announced in December from £96 million to £92·7 million? In view of the inner city problems experienced by the borough of Newham, does that not mean a reduction which the borough cannot bear? Why is he reducing the amount that the borough can spend since last month?

Mr. Ridley: The local rate in Newham is already 66 per cent. above the class average. I have never heard a word from any of the representatives of Newham in this House about the requirements and needs of the ratepayers. I should have thought that it was about time that the hon. Gentleman recognised that the ratepayers exist. It follows therefore that if we increase their spending under the Local Government Finance Bill, the grant will go down because all authorities that increase spending will lose grant. That is part of the rate support grant system.

Several Hon. Members *rose*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call the four hon. Members who have been rising regularly. I ask for brief questions, because we must move on.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Will my right hon. Friend introduce a tougher monitoring scheme for those lucky rate-capped authorities and the next top 20 high spenders? Is he aware that the citizens in Leicestershire believe that if Leicester city council had been rate capped last year they would not be losing £547,000 this year?

Mr. Ridley: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. Leicester has been a rough story. However, I can tell him that Leicestershire has this year received a big increase in grant that will help to keep down the total rate bill for my hon. Friend's constituents.

I want to correct a mistake that I made about Sefton in response to the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). I said that the rates could go down by 3·3 per cent. I should have said that they could go up by that amount.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend, I know, is well aware of the situation in Northamptonshire which, he will agree, is difficult. He knows that as a result of the teachers' settlement there is likely to be an increased cost of between £10 million and £12 million. Could my right hon. Friend tell the House what proportion of that cost will be met by central Government or by the taxpayer, and how that proportion of the cost will be calculated? As a simple matter, could he say that it would be at least 40 per cent.?

Mr. Ridley: I think that Northamptonshire has had a very unfortunate result from the settlement and I find it difficult to explain precisely why. My hon. Friend's authority has probably suffered more than any other.

With regard to the teachers' settlement, the first part of the cost that relates to the current financial year 1986-87, the proportion that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science said would be met by grant, was 46·4 per cent. That is the same as for the settlement. The proportion for the following year, 1987-88, is slightly less. The details of these figures will be sent to all local authorities very soon and my right hon. Friend will be writing to them.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Local government will no doubt welcome the extra £1 billion by way of grant entitlement that will come from the taxpayer to increase grant entitlement. Indeed, I also welcome that extra £1 billion. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Norfolk, a traditionally economic local authority, will have its grant entitlement increased as a result of his announcement this afternoon and thus prove that it pays to run a tight ship for the benefit of ratepayers and, in particular, of commerce and industry within the area that I represent?

Mr. Ridley: I can confirm that Norfolk has received a good result from the settlement and that it receives a further £14·059 million of grant which enables the county to reduce its rate precept by 1·4 per cent. if it spends at the settlement assumption. I am happy to pay tribute to the stewardship of Norfolk county council.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking in the debate at the point to which I have become accustomed, may I thank my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not usually called last.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Anyway, I am pleased to take part in the statement. I must thank my right hon. Friend and the Minister of State, who have genuinely consulted with Hertfordshire about the rate support grant, for putting in place the necessary adjustments which have saved £8 million of the proposed reduction in the rate support grant for Hertfordshire of £15 million.

So that we do not have to go through this wretched business of consultation, become angry and bother my right hon. Friend perhaps unnecessarily, will my right hon. Friend assure us that the same safeguards will be included in the rate support grant settlement next year and the year after until we introduce a new system? That would stop us from having to go through this wretched business again and again.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I was tempted to think that it would be nice if he could make the statement and not simply take part in it. However, perhaps that would be going too far.

We cannot begin to consider next year's rate support grant settlement this afternoon. We have had enough difficulty with the complexity of the present settlement. However, I note my hon. Friend's comments. We must ensure that the rather creaking system can be made to last the very few years until a better system is put in place following a successful general election and the passage of the English rates Bill.

Capital Punishment (Murder of Children)

4.37 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it a capital offence to commit the murder of a child.

It is the inescapable duty of the state to protect its children, in the most effective way that is available to it, from unlawful sexual abuse, violence and murder. The Royal Commission on Capital Punishment, which reported in 1953, described murder as the gravest of all crimes and capital punishment as the gravest of punishments for the gravest of all crimes. The murder of a child is, in terms of public concern, an outrage and the gravest and most detestable of all crimes.

I contend that, if it became part of our law once again, capital punishment would, by its deterrent effect, reduce the number of child murders. I also contend that the knock-on effect of the death penalty would deter violence and abuse towards children. Evil people who prey on children are usually cowards to pick on a defenceless child. Cowards understand the fear of death. That fear has a powerful influence over all human beings. Was is not Dr. Johnson who said that nothing concentrates the mind so much as the imminent fear of execution? I submit that nothing is more likely to make the child abuser and potential child murderer pause before interfering with a child than the knowledge that if he or she kills he or she may suffer death.

Those who oppose capital punishment always call for evidence of the deterrent effect of the death penalty knowing that they sit on safe ground. Let me explain. Someone who may have considered murdering a child but is frightened off by the thought of the death penalty will never appear as a statistic. How could he? However, in 1953 the Royal Commission concluded that the deterrent effect of capital punishment was stronger than that of any other punishment available for murder. Common sense tells us that the increase in child abuse, violence and murder has been staggering since the death penalty was abolished.

Despite all the strong measures taken by the Government, the state is simply not protecting its children to the satisfaction of public opinion. In 1985, 125 people were charged with the murder of a child. Most of the arguments that have been put forward over the years by those opposing capital punishment fall to the ground, like a pack of cards, when applied to the murder of a child. Some believe that convicted terrorists, if executed, would become martyrs. Others have made pleas for murders of passion, and so on. Another defence is that mistakes may be made. Which convicted child murderer has ever been released from prison because it was felt that a mistake had been made at the trial? Many have been released, only to kill again. Others have killed fellow prisoners. Few of the arguments against capital punishment apply when considering it for the murder of a child.

My next remarks are directed to my own Front Bench. In 1983, the then Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) said:

"If the House votes for the restoration of capital punishment for any category of offence, the Government will provide drafting assistance for a private Member's Bill designed to give effect to the expression of opinion of the House and will provide time for the Bill to be debated."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1983; Vol. 45, c. 892.]

If I am granted the leave of the House, whether unopposed or opposed, to present my Bill, I am justly entitled to expect the Government to honour that commitment and help me with parliamentary drafting services and parliamentary time. If my Bill receives the approval of Parliament today, the Government may wish to consider inserting a new clause in the Criminal Justice Bill.

The recent return of the child murderess Myra Hindley to the Saddleworth moor in my constituency has reopened painful wounds for many families and also for my constituents who live close to those moors. We must always remember that throughout the country there are hundreds of parents who have had their children snatched from play and murdered or never seen again. The thoughts and prayers of this House should be for them all.

The death penalty would have been a most appropriate sentence for Myra Hindley, Ian Brady and others like them if it had been the law at the time of their sentence. A very strong case can be made out for it. We might have saved the lives of Lesley Ann Downey and John Kilbride if the Labour Government of the day had not diluted the deterrent at the time of their killing. They undermined that deterrent by giving notice of their plans to abolish the death penalty. I suspect that Hindley and Brady took a gamble. They were right. They did not have to face the death penalty at the time of their sentence because the Labour Government had removed it.

I have a vision that once again the United Kingdom will be safe for our women to walk freely, without fear of being molested and raped, that our elderly will feel safe after dark and inside their own homes, and that our children will be able to play safely, unafraid of being abused or murdered. My vision will become a reality only if we take a tough line with the criminals, as we do with the defence of the realm. This Bill provides the opportunity for Parliament to make a start today by protecting children. I hope that hon. Members will give me leave to present my Bill for the sake of children everywhere.

4.44 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): We are in an election year. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) has a marginal seat which backs on to Saddleworth moor. That is why he has introduced this Bill. His remarks about the Labour Government of 1964 were pathetic. The murder of Leslie Ann Downey took place on Boxing Day 1964. The Labour Government had then been in office for fewer than eight weeks. To say that the incoming Labour Government took away the deterrent shows the nonsense of the hon. Gentleman's case. There was capital punishment at that time for certain forms of murder. But capital punishment has never been a deterrent. When they hanged pickpockets on Tyburn hill a crowd of 10,000 surrounded the cart, and when the noose pulled the man up into the air all the pickpockets in the crowd chose that moment to dip their hands into the pocket of the man in front. Capital punishment did not deter people from stealing sheep. The statistics prove it.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to bring back capital and non-capital murder. He wants capital punishment for certain types of offence. We had that in this country for

nine years, and at the end of the experiment Lord Chief Justice Parker said that it was an absolute fiasco that there should be capital punishment for murder involving shooting, for the theft of money, or for killing a policeman or a prison warder, but that there should not be capital punishment for the crime of poisoning. The jury had to decide, but all too often the jury dodged it and refused to convict.

How does one define the age of a child? Is somebody 15 years and 364 days old classed as a child? What happens if a person aged 16 years and one day is murdered? Is he also classed as a child? If the child who is murdered is one day over the limit, does it mean that the murderer gets away with it? What nonsense that would be.

Experience in the United States shows that when two states that are side by side—for example, Rhode Island and Massachusetts or Maine and New Hampshire whose people are in the same income groups—have capital punishment in one state but not in the other, the murder rate is exactly the same in both states. In the case of two thirds of the murders in this country, the murderer knows his victim, and one third of murders take place within the family.

Often they are crimes of passion. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the death penalty would deter crimes of passion? It did not deter crimes of passion when we had the death penalty. Albert Pierrepoint, who hanged 400 murderers, said that the death penalty was no deterrent but a desire for revenge. It is more than a desire for revenge in the case of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth. It is also a desire for votes, but his revenge would be carried out by somebody else; the hon. Gentleman would not carry out the sentence himself.

This is the first step towards the introduction of hanging for many more crimes, including terrorism and the IRA. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members cheer. There is nothing that the IRA would like more than the reintroduction of hanging. The IRA would vote for it, hostages would be kidnapped weeks before a trial took place. There would be demonstrations outside the prison and television cameras would be there all the time.

Timothy Evans was hanged——

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): For the murder of a child.

Mr. Ashton: He murdered a child, yes, but they hanged the wrong man. When the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) was Home Secretary 16 years later he had to give Evans a pardon, but by then it was too late. There have been strong doubts in many other cases: for example, in the case of David Cooper and Michael McMahon; of Patrick Meehan; of John Preece, who was released in 1973 after having served eight and a half years; and of William Leighton. They would all have been dead and it would have been too late. They were found innocent but it would have been too late.

In history, all too often, the murderer who was hanged got the sympathy. Those people who demonstrated at the gates to save Ruth Ellis remember her and not her victim. It would be the same if Myra Hindley had gone down in history as the last woman to be hanged—she would not be regarded with the same revulsion as she is now. Indeed, the British people are determined to keep her in gaol for many long years because that punishment is far worse than hanging.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth is seeking to play on people's emotions because a general election is coming up.

Over many years, the House has discussed this problem, people have sat down together in a sane and responsible way to discuss it and each time they have rejected capital punishment.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at Commencement of Public Business):—

The House divided: Ayes 110, Noes 175.

Division No. 51] **[4.50 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Corrie, John
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Durant, Tony
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Maclarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McQuarrie, Albert
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mauds, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Proctor, K. Harvey
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Tracey, Richard
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Brown and
Mr. John Powley.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashby, David
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Monig'y)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Critchley, Julian
Crowther, Stan
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dubs, Alfred
Dykes, Hugh
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, W. E.
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hayes, J.
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heffer, Eric S.
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lilley, Peter
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, William
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Reynolds, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowe, Andrew
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Snape, Peter
Stott, Roger
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Straw, Jack
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joseph Ashton and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly negatived.

The Army

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

5.1 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): It is almost a year since our last Army debate, and that year has been an important one for the Army. In Northern Ireland, it saw the security forces having to meet the most serious challenge to law and order for more than 10 years, and meeting it successfully. It saw our first major overseas exercise outside the NATO area since the Falklands conflict. Indeed, 1986 saw further new items of equipment coming into general Army use; in particular the much lighter SA80 rifle with its sophisticated telescopic sight, the new combat helmet, the S10 respirator, and new portable and lightweight thermal imaging equipment. Moreover, 1986 saw a good level of recruiting, a welcome levelling off in the rate of applications from officers for premature voluntary retirement and a further expansion of both the Territorial Army and the Home Service Force.

The Army enters 1987 materially better equipped than it has ever been and in good shape. This is due first to the fact that the present Government have met in full every one of the eight reports on service pay that we have received from the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, with phasing for just a matter of months in only two of those eight years. That is a very much better record than that of our predecessors.

The Army's good shape today is also due to the very substantial increase in expenditure on the Army over the last eight years, compared with the level in 1978-79. Indeed, the total additional expenditure on the Army in real terms by the present Government compared with the 1978-79 level will, by the end of this financial year, be more than £2,000 million, excluding additional Falklands costs. That figure shows that the criticisms of the Opposition about insufficient conventional defence expenditure are patently unjustified.

That complaint is even less warranted from a party whose party conference less than six months ago gave the following commitment:

"Over time the policy will enable us to achieve our long term goal of bringing Britain's defence spending as a proportion of national income towards the average of our major European allies."

That would represent cutting Britain's defence expenditure as a proportion of GDP by about one third.

The prime beneficiary of the huge increase in defence expenditure we have achieved for the Army—all of it strengthening our conventional capabilities—has been the 1st British Corps in Germany; and its equipment in particular. Among the major items of Army equipment ordered by the present Government—not by our predecessors—and now already in service with the 1st British Corps are the Challenger main battle tank, the Saxon armoured personnel carrier, tracked Rapier, the Javelin air defence missile, the new SA80 rifle, new personal combat kit, the Ptarmigan communication system, the Wavell computerised information system, the new night observation and gunnery sight for Chieftain and Challenger, the S10 respirator, and additional Lynx helicopters. That is, of course, not the end of the equipment transformation that we have been achieving for the Army.

In the next few years the Army will be receiving a number of further major items of equipment already ordered by the present Government including the multiple launch rocket system, Warrior, Rapier 2000 and the Starstreak air defence missile. What has been, and is continuing to take place, is the comprehensive modernisation of the Army's equipment—its armour and anti-armour capabilities giving BAOR 12 armoured regiments by the end of the decade compared with eight in 1980, its artillery, its air defence, its armoured mobility, its infantry weapons, its communications equipment and its logistic support. That could have been achieved only by the greater priority given to defence by the present Government compared with our predecessors.

The modernisation of the Army's equipment is very necessary. Last year Mr. Gorbachev called for reductions in conventional forces, both in men and equipment, from the Atlantic to the Urals. That was a welcome call, and we hope that 1987 will see a constructive response to the West's new MBFR proposals which were tabled in December 1985 and on which we are still awaiting a substantive response.

Notwithstanding the calls for reductions, however, the reality on the other side of the inner German border is that the strengthening of Soviet forces in eastern Europe continues—and continues relentlessly. The past year has seen a further significant improvement in Soviet armour. Soviet tank production in recent years is estimated to have averaged over 3,000 new tanks a year—double that of NATO.

The T64B and T80 tanks are replacing the older models. Many of these new tanks are fitted with explosive reactive armour to try to neutralise NATO anti-tank guided missiles; all can fire a guided missile through the gun barrel—a capability not possessed by current western battle tanks. Their already formidable attack helicopter capability is being strengthened still further as the older Hind helicopters are replaced by newer, better armed and equipped models. Their conventional artillery is being improved by the addition of more sophisticated munitions and new self-propelled guns. Current models of ground and air-launched anti-armour guided missiles are being replaced by models with improved guidance and a higher kill probability.

In chemical weapons the Warsaw pact's forces in Europe currently have a near monopoly. In nuclear weapons, the advantage that the Warsaw pact's ground forces have in ballistic missiles up to 300 km in range is 8:1. These figures are disturbing enough but they do not include nuclear capable artillery where Soviet superiority continues to increase as their single role conventional artillery is replaced by dual-capable artillery that can fire either conventional or nuclear shells.

Some see the answer to the massive Soviet superiority in shorter-range nuclear weapons to be a nuclear-free zone. I note that the Liberal and SDP defence policy statement issued on 16 December says, and I quote:

"We would seek a battlefield-nuclear weapon-free zone in Central Europe extending 150 km in each direction from the East/West divide. This would reduce reliance on short-range nuclear weapons and therefore the danger of their being used by either side."

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that no representative of the SDP or Liberal party is in the Chamber? Is that not absolutely——

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Would the hon. Gentleman like to withdraw those remarks?

Mr. Jessel: I withdraw what I said. I am sorry, I did not notice the hon. Gentleman, who is an Alliance Member.

Mr. Stanley: We welcome the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) to the debate and congratulate him on winning in the hotly contested competition to be the single alliance spokesman on defence.

I was referring to the alliance's policy. I must say that that policy statement must have been written by what I can describe only as the "happy illusion" brigade on the alliance Benches. Judging by what alliance Members say, that brigade is a well-manned unit. After all, the idea that a 150 km nuclear-free zone would reduce reliance on short-range nuclear weapons is, I fear, pure wishful thinking. Those short-range systems are all mobile. They can be moved back into a paper nuclear-free zone in no time at all. Even without moving any of their shortest-range weapons the Soviets could still target any point of the nuclear-free zone with other non-strategic nuclear weapons—with their SCUDs with a range of 300 km, their SS23s with a range of 500 km, their Scaleboard missiles with a range of 900 km or their SS20s with a range of 5,000 km.

The nuclear-free zone policy of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties on the central front has the same illusory quality as the nuclear-free zone policy of the London borough of Lambeth. Although the nuclear-free zone policy of those two parties would be of no value to the British Army's deployment on the central front, the non-nuclear policy of the official Opposition would be positively and hugely damaging.

A non-nuclear Britain means a non-nuclear 1st British Corps in Germany, and the House and country will want to be very clear about the implications of that. It would mean having eight NATO Army corps deployed down the inner German border with seven of those Army corps being nuclear-capable and one not. That would blow a gaping hole straight through NATO's entire deterrent posture which rests on combining conventional and nuclear defence. That is why for the Labour party to say in one breath that it supports NATO and in another that it will unilaterally scrap all Britain's nuclear defences is a complete contradiction.

To make the 1st British Corps the one and only non-nuclear corps in Germany would relegate the British Army to being NATO's lame duck on the central front. It will make the British Army of the Rhine the number one target for any Soviet offensive. It will make BAOR, not the military asset that it is today, but a military liability.

In defence terms, it is self-evidently non-viable to have seven corps deployed side by side that are nuclear-capable and one in the middle that is not. As far as the British Army is concerned, the non-nuclear policy of the Labour party can lead in one direction, and one direction only—the gradual withdrawal of the British Army from Germany. Far from strengthening NATO's conventional defence posture, the Labour party's non-nuclear defence policy will weaken it disastrously.

I shall now turn from the Army in Germany to the Army in Britain where more than 80,000 men would be available on mobilisation. As the House knows, in Exercise Brave Defender in 1985 we conducted—and conducted successfully—the largest post-war exercise in home defence. A non-classified paper summarising the lessons from this valuable exercise has been placed in the Library. Procedural and organisational improvements in the light of Brave Defender continue to be made.

A critically important component of the Army's order of battle, both at home and on the continent, are the territorial and regular reserves. The strength of the Territorial Army which was about 59,000 in May 1979, has now risen to more than 77,000—an increase of a further 1,000 since last year. The second and major phase of our planned expansion of the TA started last April. This phase involves the formation of six additional infantry battalions, an additional light reconnaissance squadron, two additional airfield damage repair squadrons, the first TA helicopter squadron and some additional support units.

The trial programme for raising TA units on the continent is making good progress. A company and four platoon-size units are now in being. I am also glad to say that last year a group of territorials from the King's Regiment undertook TA training in the Falklands for the first time.

The Home Service Force also continues to expand and now stands at over 3,000—well on target for its planned strength of about 5,000 by 1990. I have referred before to our wish to make better use of our regular reserves who represent a significant pool of trained manpower. At present, some 65,000 have war roles individually allocated to them. Work is now in hand to extend this planning, on a contingency basis, to a further 35,000 of those liable to reserve service. May I once again express our warm appreciation of those who give their valuable time and boundless enthusiasm to make the Army's reserve forces the success that they undoubtedly are.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Minister mentioned that the number of men in the Territorial Army has increased from 59,000 to 77,000 since this Government have been in power. A year ago it had 76,000 men and the Minister said in his statement at that time that there had been an increase from the previous year of 4,000. This year there has been an increase in enrolment of only 1,000. Why has enrolment slowed down? Are there any reasons for the drop from 4,000 to 1,000 a year?

Mr. Stanley: I also made it clear in my remarks that we began the second phase of our expansion only in April last year and that inevitably TA recruiting has a cyclical pattern of advertising and publicity. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman greatly welcomes the fact that the TA is now significantly stronger than it was when his party was in government.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Will he tell the House whether he has any plans or is thinking of having any plans to give further training opportunities to the Regular Army reserve, and also to the possibility of allowing people when leaving the regular forces before they go on the reserve to themselves make a commitment to train with the Regular Army reserve over the next few years?

Mr. Stanley: As my hon. Friend knows, we have been considering ways in which we can make greater use of those who have a reserve commitment. At present we do

not have any specific formal arrangements of the sort to which he has referred, but I shall gladly consider that matter further and write to him if I have anything further to add. However, there are some informal arrangements that some individuals make.

I shall now turn to the Army's role outside the NATO area. The Labour policy statement approved at its last party conference states—*[Interruption.]* Britain will face some important defence issues and, although much attention has been devoted to the Labour party's commitment to non-nuclear policy, there are other important aspects of the defence policy which we shall bring to the attention of the House and of the country.

The Labour party's policy statement which has been approved states:

"Labour will conduct an immediate review aimed at reducing and then ending out-of-area spending."

The folly of that commitment may be demonstrated simply. Since the end of the second world war the British Army has been involved in 71 operational deployments outside the United Kingdom. Of those 71 deployments, 67 have been outside the NATO area.

It is, I fear, par for the course for the Labour party to commit itself to end defence spending in those parts of the world where 40 years' experience suggests that our armed forces are most likely to be needed.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): On that point, would it not be constructive to consider the position in relation to Belize, which is the only primary jungle training centre that we now have? Allowing for the politics of that country, is it not true that if we withdrew our forces from Belize the on-cost—the amount of money that we would gain as a result,—is not much, since we would still have to pay the soldiers when we brought them back home, find them a base, and have to use and train them? Therefore, to that extent, the Labour party's suggestion on this, as on so many other defence issues, is completely nutty.

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend's latter point is entirely valid. If it were necessary to relocate back into the United Kingdom units which are at present deployed overseas there would be significant relocation and fixed costs in providing accommodation for the men and their families. My hon. Friend is also right to highlight the training aspect of that policy. I would stress that with the inevitable unpredictability of the world, the historic pattern and the whole of the post-war experience, it is likely that greater need for British armed services in operation will take place outside the NATO area.

The Falklands conflict itself showed the importance of maintaining and improving our ability to take action outside the NATO area. In November we were able to carry out the first major exercise demonstrating this capability in Exercise Saif Sareea in the Oman, deploying our new joint force headquarters with elements of both 5 Airborne Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade, along with RAF Tornados and transport aircraft.

The exercise successfully demonstrated our capability to mount an out-of-area deployment rapidly by air and provided an excellent opportunity to practise tri-service operations with a host country. We are making a very detailed study of the lessons to be learnt from Saif Sareea and will look for further opportunities in the future to exercise our out-of-area capability.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Minister leaves our out-of-area capability, *The Independent* has reported twice, most recently this morning under the by-line of Frances Wheen, that talks are taking place in Washington with Argentina on the future of the Falklands. Are those talks taking place? Is Mr. Wheen right or wrong?

Mr. Stanley: That is an interesting question and one for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, as the talks do not involve the British Army.

Another important aspect of our out-of-area defence commitments is the military assistance that we give overseas. Last year we had more than 650 service men, of which the Army's component was 450, serving in that role in 28 countries — all outside the NATO area. These service men and, now a few service women as well, do an extremely valuable job for Britain, often in testing conditions. They provide high quality training for our friends around the world, and support our important defence sales efforts overseas. I note that the Labour party has acknowledged that its policies will lead to a major reduction in our defence sales, which last year were worth approximately £5 billion, and I am sure that this commitment will also be well noted by the many thousands of people in all parts of Britain whose jobs are dependent on defence exports.

A further contribution that the Army has made outside the NATO area is in disaster relief. In 1986 the Queen's Gurkha Engineers and Royal Signalers assisted the Solomon Islands in the wake of cyclone Namu. Medical, engineer and signalling assistance from Belize was given to Jamaica following severe flooding there last June, and members of the Parachute Regiment also gave help. In October, the Belize garrison provided similar assistance to San Salvador following the earthquake there.

Of the Army's service men deployed outside the NATO area I should particularly like to refer to two groups. The first are those who served in successive training teams in Uganda between March 1984, when Britain took over the training task previously undertaken there by a mixed training team drawn from seven Commonwealth countries, and November of last year, when our training team completed its scheduled task for the Government of President Museveni. A total of 140 service men, all from the Army, have served in Uganda over the past four and a half years, during what, sadly, has been a turbulent period for that country. Our training team there has worked steadily, calmly and professionally. Despite the difficulties and the moments of personal danger, it has performed extremely creditably.

The second group are the members of the Royal Military Police. For many years they have played a key role in giving personal protection to those at risk from terrorist attack, not least in Northern Ireland. In recent years as the terrorist threat has widened and become more acute for some of our diplomatic personnel, two of whom have been assassinated in the past three years, the role of the Royal Military Police has been extended to the protection of certain ambassadors and high commissioners in high-risk locations, where they are providing an invaluable service.

I can tell the House that the presence of the Royal Military Police has helped considerably in protecting our diplomats in both Beirut and Uganda. The contribution of the Royal Military Police in personal protection has never been in greater demand and we are extremely grateful for the expertise it provides.

[Mr. Stanley]

Operationally much the most important and demanding task for the Army in 1986 was the support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland. As I said earlier, 1986 saw the security forces in Northern Ireland having to meet their most serious challenge for a number of years. The security forces have risen to that challenge, and, with the aid of the RUC, have met it successfully. But it has meant that at the end of 1986 the Army in Northern Ireland was larger than at the beginning of the year. This is the first year in which this has happened since 1972, but we hope to reverse the trend again this year.

The fact that we were ready to increase the scale of the Army's deployment to Northern Ireland, and to do so quickly, is the clearest possible evidence of the Government's determination to root out terrorism and to overcome intimidation in the Province.

The greater challenge to the security forces last year arose from a combination of factors. These included the intensive use of home-made mortars to bomb security force bases, and the ruthless intimidation, including cold-blooded murder, of building contractors and others serving the security forces. I am glad to say, however, that the position was more encouraging by the end of 1986 than at the beginning.

The tactic of intimidating building contractors has been met successfully. Using both private contractors and the Royal Engineers, ably supported by the Royal Pioneer Corps, the past year has seen a major programme of rebuilding and strengthening our bases.

I should like to pay tribute to the Royal Engineers who this year celebrate the 200th anniversary of the granting of their royal charter. In the wars and campaigns since 1787 the sappers have constantly demonstrated their indispensability.

The Royal Engineers have been serving in Northern Ireland continually since the start of the present troubles in 1969, but if any year there deserved to be called the "Year of the Sappers" it was 1986. The first engineer reinforcement squadron was deployed to the Province in October 1985. The sappers set to work with a will, and never let up. By the end of last year they had completely rebuilt two police stations; increased protection at 30 other police stations and Army bases; and erected new observation posts in south Armagh and improved existing ones. In addition, the Royal Engineers themselves designed new forms of blast walls, a new design of protected accommodation for police stations, and a new type of roof to overcome the effect of a mortar bomb.

In the past year there is no doubt that lives have been saved and injuries prevented as a direct result of the additional protection provided by the Royal Engineers. I know that the whole House will want to join with me in expressing our appreciation to the Royal Engineers for their life-saving work in Northern Ireland last year and in congratulating them on their 200th anniversary. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

As for positive successes in 1986, the security forces killed four individuals engaged in terrorist activities, and 630 people had been charged with terrorist offences up to the end of November. A total of 215 weapons were found, together with more than 5,000 lb of explosives and 29,000 rounds of ammunition.

Although this is a debate on the Army, I should particularly like to pay tribute to the immense and selfless contribution of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the past year as it is fundamental to the Army's own efforts.

The RUC is in the front line in Northern Ireland in every sense. The lead responsibility for security is the RUC's; the Army is in a support role to the police, but they work together in the most closely integrated and co-ordinated way at all levels.

Once again, the RUC was the prime terrorist target and, for the second year running, suffered a greater number of men killed than either the Regular Army or the UDR. In addition, RUC officers and their families had to face deplorable physical harrassment, including petrol bombing of their homes from so-called loyalist extremists.

Notwithstanding those intense pressures, the RUC achieved policing of an exceptionally high standard, not merely in the calm, ordered and even-handed way in which it dealt with large-scale marches and demonstrations, but in the great skill and professionalism which it has shown in countering terrorist operations. The House will want to know that the great majority of the finds of terrorist weapons and explosives and of the terrorist arrests I mentioned were due to excellent police work by the RUC for whom praise cannot be too high.

Just as exposed to terrorist attack as the RUC are the men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment, which is responsible for first line military support to the police in the 85 per cent. of the land area of the Province which contains about 80 per cent. of the population. Like the RUC, the men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment are vulnerable to terrorist assassination off-duty as well as on, and after they have retired from the regiment as well as while they are serving. Last year the UDR suffered more men killed than the Regular Army in Northern Ireland, as has been the case for six out of the past 10 years. The grim reality of their off-duty vulnerability is brought out by the fact that of the 92 UDR soldiers who have lost their lives in the past 10 years, 74 have been murdered off duty. In addition, 31 men have been murdered who had already retired from service with the regiment. That the regiment has some 6,500 men and women serving with it today is a tremendous personal tribute to those concerned.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of the Ulster Defence Regiment, I should like to ask him whether it might be possible for some of those politicians — perhaps also those south of the border who are ill-disposed towards the UDR, in spite of all that it does at great cost for the defence of the people—to be persuaded to pay a visit to the UDR to meet some of the battalions, to see what they are like and what they do, because that is of great importance. I do not agree with the Anglo-Irish agreement, but it is implicit in that agreement that there should be an understanding of the security arrangements on both sides of the border. Could some arrangement be made to educate some of those politicians as to what the Ulster Defence Regiment is really like?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that we have been engaged in that process. Last year we issued invitations to the political parties in the Province for briefings on the role of the UDR so that the precise nature of its work could be properly and dispassionately explained to them and so that we had the opportunity of

responding to their questions. Some responded to those invitations, but others did not. I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point, and we wish to get across the real nature of the work done by that important regiment.

Finally, turning to the Regular Army in Northern Ireland, we have maintained two additional battalions on four-month unaccompanied tours for the greater part of last year. That meant a total of eight infantry battalions having to make short-notice, unexpected, deployments to Northern Ireland in 1986. Despite the regimental and personal family disruption that caused, the battalions involved responded extremely well and quickly became effective on the ground. It is the infantry which is in the front line of the campaign, as is borne out by the fact that a total of 18 infantry battalions served in the Province during 1986.

The Army has been highly effective in the Province during 1986 with its intensive patrolling and its continually improving surveillance. There have been a number of conspicuous specific successes. The bomb disposal teams, who again cannot be praised too highly, have rendered safe some 82 separate devices containing over 9,000 lb of explosive. Quick action by a lance-corporal on his own initiative led to the find of three loaded weapons and the arrest of three men. A vigorous follow up by a Royal Marine patrol of a terrorist shoot in Belfast in September led to a terrorist being killed. Similarly swift action by a patrol in identifying and reacting to a shooting attack in Londonderry in February led to one terrorist being killed and one man being arrested and subsequently charged with attempted murder.

The courage and skill shown by Regular Army and the UDR in Northern Ireland last year is reflected in the 120 decorations for gallantry in Northern Ireland that were awarded. These included three Military medals, two George medals, and one Queen's gallantry medal.

The Army enters 1987 well-recruited and well-occupied. It has a great deal of new equipment that has come into service since 1979 and a great deal more in the pipeline. It performs a huge range of roles from counter-terrorism to disaster relief with unfailingly high professional standards and strong individual commitment.

The British Army is a fine standard-bearer for our country round the world and makes a key contribution to the maintenance of the peace with freedom that we enjoy at home. Our warm appreciation goes to the men and women of the British Army who serve us so very well.

5.36 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Minister of State for the Armed Forces quite rightly paid tribute to the skill and professionalism of the Army—indeed, to all the armed forces—in the many roles that it is asked to perform in the United Kingdom, specifcally in Northern Ireland, and outside the United Kingdom in the places that he mentioned, for example, in Germany, the Falkland Islands, Belize and other parts of the world.

I readily pay tribute also, because on my visits to various armed units I have seen the professionalism and skill of the Army. No doubt that applies to other hon. Members. Therefore, I should like to pay my personal tribute to the forces and to say also that one is always struck by their niceness—I know that that is not an elegant word—and by their civility and good humour when one visits them. I am sure that I am speaking for most people who meet our armed forces.

The Minister gave us the same world tour that he gave us last year. However, this time it was a little spiced with a bit of political knockabout and a few selective quotes here and there, no doubt on orders from Smith square because this might well be an election year. I understand why the Minister did that but, of course, he considered the past and talked very little about the future. I am not surprised about that because there is not much stomach these days in the Ministry of Defence for looking very far ahead in terms of the defence budget. One can understand that, because it is quite clear to most independent analysts that if, by some freak, the Tory party wins the next election, we shall pretty rapidly be faced with a major and fundamental defence review. There is little doubt about that, because the defence budget is out of control and the Government are not prepared to try to do anything to rein it back while facing what might be an election year.

Mr. Robert Atkins: What about the Labour party's defence review?

Mr. Davies: When the cuts start, they will fall on the Army as they will, no doubt, fall also upon the Navy and the Air Force. The cuts will fall not only on the Army, but on our contribution to NATO. The Minister mentioned commitment to NATO and, as he knows, 95 per cent. of our defence budget goes to NATO on conventional defence expenditure. When the cuts come, as they will, they will fall on conventional defence expenditure, and that means on our conventional contribution to NATO at a time when, I should have thought, we need to build up NATO's conventional defences and not weaken them. However, in view of the expenditure on Trident, the Government's policy will mean a reduction in the conventional contribution to NATO and, specifically in the case of the British Army, will mean a weakening of our contribution in Germany in respect of the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Marlow: On the subject of reducing our contribution in BAOR, if we arrive at the position explained by my right hon. Friend the Minister where 1(BR)Corps is the only fighting formation in Germany that does not have the nuclear umbrella—I think that hon. Gentlemen know what that means—and if, sadly, there is a conflict with the Warsaw pact and it threatens 1(BR)Corps with a nuclear onslaught, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what he would say to our NATO allies? Would he say, "On no account do we want you to come to our defence," or would he say, "Yes, do come to our defence."?

Mr. Davies: I shall deal with that later. I was saying that it makes no sense to weaken the conventional arm of NATO within Europe to pay for Trident, which is basically what the Government will do. Conservative Members talk glibly about the nuclear umbrella. I would have thought that the first priority should be to strengthen conventional arms so that we never reach that awful moment when nuclear artillery and nuclear shells are called upon.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead) *rose*——

Mr. Davies: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

The cuts will come, first because the Government have ended the 3 per cent. NATO commitment initially entered into by the Labour Government. Secondly, the cuts will

[Mr. Davies]

come because the Government have made a decision not to allow defence expenditure to increase in real terms. Thirdly, within the total of the declining defence expenditure, there is an escalating expenditure for Trident, certainly over the next four or five years. Therefore, the defence budget will be cut and there will be a major defence review if the Tories win the next election. Indeed, that has already started for the Army. I am interested to note that the Minister did not mention the fact that it is apparently reported that this year the Army has had to face £150 million-worth of cuts, and over the next two years it is reported that the Army will have to reduce its expenditure by up to 4 per cent. and that has been calculated to be about £250 million a year. No doubt that money will come from different parts of the armed forces but much of it will come as a result of not buying new equipment and postponing the purchase of the equipmet that is needed for our conventional defence in Europe.

Dr. Glyn: The Minister made it perfectly clear that the money that has been spent was on the modernisation of conventional forces and there is no sign of a reduction.

Mr. Davies: With respect, the Minister talked about the past but he did not say anything about next year. I can understand why he did not want to talk about next year for the reasons I have just given.

The major commitment, despite the problems in Northern Ireland, is the commitment of 55,000 troops in Germany. That is probably the furthest east that a standing British Army has ever been in peacetime for such a long period. That is a major commitment for Britain in view of our history and in view of our expenditure and so on.

Mr. Robert Atkins: What about India?

Mr. Davies: I meant to say furthest east in Europe. I accept that India is further east than Germany. It is a major commitment in terms of money, men and resources.

To enable the British Army to perform its function in Germany and to play its part in NATO, two things are necessary. It needs modern equipment. The Minister has recounted some of the improvements of the past few years. The Army together with our NATO allies needs to know that if war should break out in that part of Europe, the war it will be called upon to fight will be carried out in accordance with a sensible and credible military strategy.

Despite what the Minister said, there are woeful gaps in the equipment needed by the British Army of the Rhine. For instance, the Army is well short of the sort of anti-tank weapons and missiles that are required, especially in respect of the more modern Soviet tanks we have been told about. Artillery is another area of neglect. Perhaps artillery is always neglected in peacetime, I know not. It is certainly not as romantic or dramatic as driving around in tanks or sitting behind a 25-pounder, or whatever the latest type of weapon may be. However, perhaps the Minister could have told us something about the SP70. What is happening about that? Apparently, Britain, Germany and Italy have already spent about £250 million and Britain's share has been £88 million.

To make a speech about the Army and devote a third of it to our defences in Germany against the Warsaw pact, with its preponderance of artillery, and not even mention an expenditure of £88 million and the importance of the SP70 for the Army is ridiculous. Is it true that it is about to be cancelled and that it is only a question of which country will dare to do it first? Is it true that the Government are thinking of buying a piece of American equipment off the shelf? I hope that when the Minister winds up he will tell the House what is happening to the SP70, especially in view of the fact that the position on artillery, as General Farndale said some time ago, is not very good for the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Rogers: My right hon. Friend has mentioned the £250 million that has been spent on the SP70. Is it not true that only 15 of the howitzers have been made? That would mean a cost of £17 million per howitzer.

Mr. Davies: That may be the case. We would like to know where the £88 million has gone. I do not think that the SP70 is a particularly complex weapon; perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps we will be told where the money has gone when the Minister replies to the debate.

The Minister talked about Soviet tanks. Apparently there is a new generation of mine which is useful in stopping tanks. However, the Government announced before Christmas that they were not going ahead with the purchase and production of those mines. What is happening about the new generation of mines that could be so effective in stopping those tanks charging across the West German border?

This year we had half a sentence on helicopters. Last year we had a paragraph. Last year the Minister sought to make our flesh creep with an account of the new Soviet helicopters. He said:

"The formidable Hind anti-tank helicopter is still being added to the Warsaw pact front line at a fast rate.

The Warsaw pact's logistic support for its forces will shortly be further improved with the deployment of its new heavy lift helicopter . . . We saw for ourselves in the Falklands what a force multiplier helicopters in the logistic role can be."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1115.]

What are the Government doing about helicopters? Paragraph 68 of the report of the Select Committee on Defence said that a study was being conducted, that the results of the study would be known by the autumn and that the Government would make their decision at the end of 1986 or early this year. What has happened in respect of that study and what decisions will be made?

The British Army has never had a purpose-built anti-tank helicopter and it needs one. As I understand it, we are about 100 helicopters short of our NATO requirement on the central front. There are some unkind people who say that we have the oldest fleet of helicopters in the Western Alliance. Indeed, it may well be that we have fewer than 30 transporter helicopters, Chinooks and Pumas, on the central front. How can the Minister talk about the Army without mentioning artillery, helicopters or mines? They are all crucial defences against the Warsaw pact, especially the tanks, which, as we are continually reminded, it has in large numbers.

As well as equipment, our forces in Germany need to have a military strategy that is credible and sensible. That certainly is not the case any longer in respect of present NATO strategy.

NATO has now reached a point where its strategy of forward defence, the conventional arm of part of the strategy, and the strategy of flexible response, the nuclear

part of that strategy, is no longer militarily credible. It owes far more to political considerations and to history than it does to military prudence.

We debate these matters very rarely in the House, but, put simply, NATO strategy is as follows. There is a massive conventional preponderance of arms with the Warsaw pact. The war in Europe will be a short conventional war, because the linear line of defence will be broken fairly quickly and the Germans, as somebody suggested from a sedentary position, do not wish to see any of their territory fought over in a conventional sense. After a few days, the request is made to go nuclear. Apparently, the strategy does not seek to defend territory conventionally, but is quite prepared to destroy that very territory which it is not prepared to defend conventionally by dropping nuclear shells and possibly nuclear bombs on that battlefield.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): We are following the right hon. Gentleman's arguments, and we want to treat him seriously, as we trust he wants to treat the House. I am an assiduous attender of the North Atlantic Assembly; I chaired the military unit. I have never heard such a travesty. No one talks about dropping huge bombs on the battlefield after a few days because we are fed up fighting a conventional war, thus blowing ourselves up in the process.

Mr. Davies: The strategy is perfectly clear. It is—the Minister of State for the Armed Forces implied this, because this was his criticism of us—that if deterrence fails, and nobody has ever suggested that deterrence will never fail, or can never fail, war will become a battlefield nuclear war in central Europe. *[Interruption.]* What are these dual-capable artillery guns that the Minister was talking about for? What are all these nuclear weapons for, which in the main, the Americans have? They are there to be used; they are there to be dropped. They are there to be used should deterrence fail and a conventional war is being lost. In this case, "lost" means if German territory has to be given up. That is NATO strategy, and I am sorry that hon. Members either do not want to know or think about these things or prefer not to talk about them.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Davies: I shall not give way; other people wish to speak. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech when the time comes.

Since most nuclear artillery in particular has a short range, it will, by definition, be used on NATO territory.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: No.

Mr. Davies: Because of the short range of much of this artillery, and because the battle will be fought on NATO territory—nobody is suggesting that we are attacking the other side, and we are postulating the situation where a conventional war becomes nuclear—much of that artillery will be dropped on the NATO battlefield between the River Elbe on the one side and the River Weser on the other. Hon. Members should accept that, and they should not shut their eyes to it, because that is the reality of the position. *[Interruption.]* That artillery will be dropped on NATO territory because of its range and because it is there to destroy Russian tanks. I am sure that the Minister will tell hon. Members exactly what the range of those weapons is. It will fall on NATO territory to destroy Soviet formations, and that will inevitably destroy NATO forces, German towns and German civilian population. That has been, and is, the objection voiced by Chancellor Schmidt, Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger and others. That has always been the objection to this crazy strategy of flexible response and forward defence.

Will the Minister tell us—he talked about the problems of not using these shells—who decides when this nuclear artillery will be used? Will it be after two or three days? With the difficulty of communication, field commanders may have to make a request within two or three days of that war breaking out. It may be seven or eight days. Who will decide? It will not be a military decision, but a political decision. Who will decide? Will it be the British Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, the Dutch or the Belgians? Who will decide to start a nuclear war in central Europe in the middle of a conventional war? The House is not told about these things. Nobody wants to know about or to listen to these things, but we should be told what the chain of decision is in the event of deterrence failing and the scenario, which NATO seems to believe could happen, actually happening.

Mr. Robert Atkins: While the right hon. Gentleman is on the subject of shells, will he consider the possibility, indeed the probability, of the Warsaw pact using its current chemical-capability shells—1 in 4? How would we respond to that? What would his reaction be if it started tossing those things at NATO? Would he forget about them, ignore them or try to respond in some way?

Mr. Davies: I do not wish to discuss chemical weapons. We do not disagree with the Government on chemical weapons. The Government have no intention of equipping the British forces in Germany with chemical weapons. I know that there is a lobby for chemical rearmament of the British Army. The hon. Gentleman has asked that question on numerous occasions. When he cannot think of anything else to say he is up on his feet talking about chemical weapons. It is an important subject.

The question of flexible response relates wholly to nuclear weapons. Presumably, since most of these nuclear warheads are American-made and owned, the decision will be taken by the President of the United States. There may be consultation with the German Chancellor and the British Prime Minister because of the involvement of the various forces with the weaponry, but the reality would be that an American President—perhaps the Minister will tell us when he replies—would decide.

What would he be asked? He would be asked, and he would have to decide, to unleash a first use, or a first strike, of nuclear weaponry, not from American territory to Russian territory, but on European soil in Germany, where there are hundreds of thousands of American troops and civilians as well as other NATO forces, and a large number of German citizens and towns.

We all have our opinions about these things. I do not believe that an American President, in view of the enormity of the moral and military consequences, would agree to unleash those weapons in Europe, thereby breaking the nuclear threshold and inviting a retaliatory nuclear attack from the Warsaw pact. Such a war would probably escalate into a general nuclear conflagration. I do not believe that it would happen.

The United States Defence Secretary, Caspar Weinberger—if I may mention his name from the

[Mr. Davies]

Labour Benches—in a speech in the United States on 9 October 1985 completely rejected the strategy which is called flexible response. He sometimes talks sense and on that occasion he said:

"Our position"—

no doubt, the position of the United States—

"on the uses of military power represents a rejection of received wisdom about limited war and gradual escalation."

If that is not a statement that he does not believe in flexible response either, I do not know what is, because the limited war is the limited battlefield war in central Europe, and the gradual escalation is the escalation from the so-called smaller weapons—the shells—on upwards, presumably, to the cruise and Pershing missiles. The truth is—the Conservative party realises this—that the strategy is completely incredible and out of date.

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I can certainly assure him that the American Defence Secretary is committed to the doctrine of flexible response. I have been following the thrust of the right hon. Gentleman's arguments closely and I should be grateful if he could tell the House whether, if his policies were implemented and the 1st British Corps on the central front had no nuclear capability, the use of the formidable Soviet short-range nuclear capability against British forces on the central front would be more or less likely.

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman talks about the nuclear capability of the 1st British Corps. That nuclear capability in respect of artillery will only be there when a decision has been taken to release the shells which can then be used. The right hon. Gentleman talks as if that is a military decision; that the military capability is there, the commander puts the bomb in the howitzer and that is it. The right hon. Gentleman talks about the nuclear capability of the first British Corps, but who makes that decision? It is not a military but a political decision and every Government will preserve the right to decide whether to take that decision. The right hon. Gentleman does not know whether a British Prime Minister or an American President would allow the 1st British Corps to have that nuclear capability, as he calls it. Before it can have it, there must be a political decision to release the actual warheads.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I have been following the right hon. Gentleman's point with some care. If I understand him correctly, he is drawing a scenario in which the might of the Warsaw pact has been unleashed against NATO, and he questions, as everyone of us must have questioned, whether NATO will remain united and be prepared to use its weaponry against such an attack. If he questions that, how does he condone his party's policy of saying that it still supports NATO? He cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Davies: I am not questioning whether NATO will remain united. Surely the hon. Gentleman, as a former Defence Minister, will understand that I am making the point that the decision to use this so-called nuclear capability would be a political, not a military, decision, taken by the Governments of the time and, in the main, taken by the President of the United States. I do not believe that the President would do so, but that is a matter of belief.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North) *rose*—

Mr. Marlow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. When considering the point made by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), perhaps my right hon. Friend would like to ponder the fact that, when references are made to the massive strength of the Warsaw pact and the great threat that it poses, the frontier posts on the northern boundaries of Norway—which, as my right hon. Friend will know, is a member of NATO—which guard against Soviet ingression receive their electricity supplies from Soviet power stations. What kind of threat would that be?

Mr. Davies: I shall not go into the threat within Norway. Perhaps we can discuss that in another debate. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps a naval debate would be more appropriate to discuss the threat in that part of Europe.

I was saying that the strategy is out of date. I am sure that Conservative Members often read their copies of the NATO treaty. Although article 2 of that treaty does not mention nuclear weapons, it is apparently considered to be the United States' commitment to the nuclear umbrella—if one wishes to use that cliché or shorthand. Article 2 was drafted when the United States had a nuclear monopoly. The Soviet Union had no nuclear weapons when article 2 was drafted, so it was perfectly easy to give that commitment. Then we moved from the monopoly of the United States to nuclear superiority and something had to be done about the original tripwire strategy. Of course, the something became the formulation of flexible response. That was still all right at that time because the United States still had quite massive superiority, as it did at the time of the Cuba crisis. But now superiority has become, at the least, parity in almost every area of nuclear weaponry. For that reason, the strategy must change and I have no doubt that eventually it will because it makes no sense.

Again, let me quote Caspar Weinberger in the same speech from which I quoted earlier, when he made that very point:

"The world has changed so profoundly"—

listening to the Minister, one would not think so—

"since the 1950s and 1960s when most of our strategic ideas were formulated that many of these concepts are now obsolete."

That is the Defence Secretary of the United States commenting on the NATO strategy of flexible response.

We believe that the only sensible defence, and, of course, deterrence, is and would be a conventional one in central Europe. *[Interruption.]* The moment that one mentions conventional defence we have this hysteria from the Conservative party. We are told about the massive Russian conventional superiority. The Prime Minister implied—perhaps said, although I do not have the quotation—that it was impossible to bridge the gap in conventional weapons. I see some hon. Members nodding sagely. Therefore we would always have to have nuclear weaponry. That is not the view of the United States, but that is the level of the debate that we have in Britain on such matters.

If the Russians have such massive conventional superiority, if they have so many more battalions, the war

cannot be won even with battlefield nuclear weapons. Presumably, if we drop ours, they will do the same, and at the end of the day the bigger battalions will win.

Let us look again at conventional Soviet superiority. It cannot be denied that in some areas there is a gap while in others there is not. I do not believe, and most independent experts do not believe, that that gap is unbridgeable. It can be bridged, given the political will, with some increase—not a great increase—in financial resources and if there is a movement away from the simple linear forward defence to a defence in greater layers in that part of Germany which would be affected. One thing is certain——

Mr. Marlow: A sort of Maginot line.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman intervenes again.

One thing is certain. The Russians certainly are not in a position to fight a conventional war of attrition in that part of Europe. For a start, the Western Alliance—the United States, Canada and the European countries—have twice the population of the Warsaw pact. Economic capacity and economic strength are difficult matters to work out. There is certainly a 4:1 or 5:1 advantage in economic and industrial power. The Soviet Union will be faced not only by Germany, as it was in the last war, but by most of Germany this time, plus, of course, the United States, all the other countries in NATO, and the Chinese who are perched on its border.

Frankly, the idea that the Russians would be capable of fighting a war of attrition against the West, is ridiculous. It would be hard for them to sustain a standing start blitzkreig, despite the fact that they have 4·8 million men in uniform. In fact, about one third of those men are not militarily capable of fighting because they are engaged in other duties. Having accepted that, it still would be virtually impossible for them to sustain the kind of blitzkreig attack that is mentioned from time to time.

On current deployment, the Soviet Union units probably could mount a surprise attack only in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. If it sought to use and move its units in the Ukraine and western military districts, it is doubtful whether it would be able to conduct a surprise attack that would guarantee it some advantage or victory.

I repeat that we accept entirely that there is some gap, especially in ground forces in central Europe, equipment and, indeed, the way in which they are deployed. That gap can be closed by providing more equipment in certain areas, but it is necessary to consider the concept of forward defence because it needs to be restructured.

Despite some modifications — I think that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced some modification last year—forward defence is still a linear defence, not a static defence. It is a linear defence with tanks. That is what is wrong with it. There are mechanised troops — troops in tanks, best suited for operational manoeuvre and manoeuvre in depth. They are pinned down in a linear forward defence. Frankly, nobody believes—the Germans will not believe this—that that type of linear forward defence can possibly hold. It is bound to break under a mass attack of tanks from the other side, not because we are weak but because the strategy of using tanks for that purpose does not make much military sense.

Many military experts have been mentioned. There are military experts in Germany and Britain. People such as General Sir Hugh Beach, General Sir Edward Burgess and Brigadier Richard Simkins, who wrote an interesting book on this subject, have argued that forward defence should gradually give way to a more layered defence in part of Germany, thereby making it unnecessary to go through the nonsense of pretending that, somehow, we can use nuclear weaponry in the defence of western Europe.

I must not mention ditches. That would be a terrible subject to mention. In fact, as the House well knows, it was an American idea to have tank traps or ditches, but there are physical and electronic barriers and land mines, which the Government do not want the British Army to have. Physical and electronic barriers could be used as a first layer. It is perfectly possible to have, as a second layer, lightly armed infantry and then, as a third layer of manoeuvrability, tanks. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members can make their own speeches. I have discovered that the Tory party does not take defence seriously. It trots out the handouts it gets and does not attempt to think through strategy or any other problems. With that kind of gradual change—the change will be gradual—in the concept of forward defence, it will be possible to have a much greater defence in depth in Germany and we would not have to resort to the nonsense of thinking we can use nuclear weapons.

It is depressing that we do not debate these matters very often in the House. In this possible election year, it is almost impossible to debate these matters as Tory Members trot out their clichés and their handouts from Smith square. As long as we have these attitudes, as long as there is no attempt to discuss strategy, as long as there are cuts because of Trident and the declining defence budget, and unless someting is done, over the next few years, the British Army will be faced with equipment that is not up to standard and, whatever happens, will be faced with a strategy that makes no military sense.

6.16 pm

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): It was interesting to listen to the speech of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). He should discuss the latter part of his speech with some of his colleagues, particularly the right hon. Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert), who wrote an interesting article in the *Sunday Telegraph* in October. He dealt with the point which the right hon. Gentleman adumbrated in the last few moments of his speech. In his article, the right hon. Member for Dudley, East wrote:

> "The idea that you can keep up our conventional forces by a few tanks and a couple of frigates and that this would compensate NATO commanders for the loss of their nuclear facilities is misleading to the point of mendacity."

I should not have put it as strongly as that but perhaps it would be wrong to put it more mildly. The right hon. Member for Llanelli might care to deal with the point raised by the right hon. Member for Dudley, East who delivered such a severe indictment.

I welcome the fact that we continue to have single service debates. The matters of grand strategy with which the right hon. Member for Llanelli dealt—frankly, I do not think that his strategy was grand — were less appropriate for a debate on the Army than for our broad debates on the White Paper. Single service debates enable us to home in on matters of more detail in relation to the armed forces. Some hon. Members had considerable doubts about the organisation of the Ministry of Defence

[Sir Antony Buck]

and, particularly, the abolition of single service Ministers. One of the assurances that we received at the time of the reorganisation was that single service debates would continue, so that we could home in on matters relating specifically to the individual forces and, as a general rule, save broad strategic considerations of defence for the general debate on the White Paper.

It is my privilege to represent a garrison constituency. I represent Colchester, North, and my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary represents the other part of that garrison town. We work harmoniously together and, I am glad to say, with the garrison. The eastern district headquarters are in Colchester. We have an admirable relationship with Major-General Ramsay, the GoC. He goes to considerable lengths to keep in touch with the local such as my right hon. Friend and myself. We have an extremely amicable relationship.

The headquarters of 19 Infantry Brigade, or 19 Air Portable Brigade—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell me exactly what it is called—currently are in Colchester. Other units of considerable importance are situated there also. The military corrective training centre, which is nearing its 50th anniversary—it may be even older — is at long last in the concluding stages of rebuilding. For years the centre has occupied wasteful and uncomfortable nissen huts, but the rebuilding is coming to fruition. It is very much hoped that some senior personage —perhaps a member of the royal family—will open the new MCTC.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Prince Edward.

Sir Antony Buck: I shall not respond to my hon. Friend's intervention from a sedentary position.

Admirable work is done at the MCTC. It has certain advantages over similar civilian institutions. All the soldiers under sentence are young and fit and can be kept busy in a way that is not possible in a civilian prison. I pay tribute to the work done over the years by the MCTC. Because of pressure from both sides of the House over a long period, the centre will at last move from its old clapped-out nissen huts to new premises. Everyone, especially the staff, in Colchester is grateful for that.

The 19 Air Portable Brigade is part of the strategic reserve and an important unit. There are also resident battalions in my constituency which change with some rapidity. It is difficult to keep track of them because often they go on tours to Northern Ireland. At the moment, we have an extremely good relationship with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders which are doing a term of duty in the Falkland Islands. I think that all hon. Members will wish them well in their work.

It is appropriate for me, as chairman of the Conservative party's defence committee, to pay tribute to the work of our armed forces in the Falklands. I had the privilege of leading the first parliamentary delegation to the Falklands after the confrontation and after we had dispatched the Argentines. I had the pleasure of the company of several Opposition Members. The journey was an extraordinary experience. One can look at a map to see the fantastic distances that must be covered to send an expeditionary force to the other side of the world, but there is nothing like covering the route oneself.

There was a relatively comfortable journey to Ascension Island in a DC10. The flight was dry but, other than that, it was like an ordinary civilian aeroplane. One travelled from Ascension Island in a semi-pressurised Hercules — an extraordinary experience. For 16 hours one pounded over the ocean. Two in-flight refuellings were carried out with remarkable expertise by the Royal Air Force. I went up to the co-pilot's seat for the second in-flight refuelling by a former V bomber and saw the difficulties encountered. The maximum speed of a Hercules is about equal to the stalling speed of a former V bomber, so in-flight refuelling occurs from a low dive from 28,000 or 29,000 ft to about 6,000 ft. The RAF carried out the refuelling in a relaxed and amazingly skilful way. The Hercules was packed with army equipment and personnel.

Our armed forces can be very proud of their work in the Falklands. Operations in the Falklands are tri-service, as they were during the war. Inevitably and rightly, the Army plays a major part, although all the services share the credit for maintaining our position in the Falklands. We are grateful to the armed forces for the way in which they are sustaining themselves and our presence there.

We are all grateful to the Army for its clearing of the minefields. Laying those minefields was one of the most irresponsible actions of the Argentines. Many of the mines are plastic, which are virtually undetectable by conventional mine-detecting devices. I saw men prodding inch by inch with bayonets to get the mines out of the ground. I believe that that hazardous exercise has finished, although some parts of the Falklands have been cordoned off with barbed wire. That land probably will never be utilised because of the virtually indestructible plastic mines used by the Argentines. I believe that the presence of the Army in the Falklands will prevent any foolhardy successor to Galtieri from embarking on a similar venture.

It seems to me, because I remain in pretty close touch with the Army in and near my constituency, that Members on both sides of the House should be proud of the calibre of our armed forces. One could almost say that too high a proportion of our talented young people go into the armed forces, but it would be inappropriate for me as chairman of the Conservative party's defence committee seriously to put forward such a view. One never ceases to be amazed at the extraordinarily high calibre of the young men whom one meets in the messes of the Army and the other services. We are fortunate that we have in our country people who are prepared to sustain the armed forces. We can be confident that the quality and calibre of today's Army fully lives up to the calibre of those who served in the past.

6.27 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I should like to follow the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) in paying tribute to the Army's performance, skill and dedication. Like him, I represent a traditional Army town. I have lived there for 25 years. One cannot live for so long in a town such as Woolwich without being well aware of how much we owe to the professionalism and commitment of our soldiers.

Woolwich has provided essential support services to the Army for generations. I hope that the House will therefore understand if I begin with some domestic issues which affect the community in Woolwich. In my 12 years as a Member of Parliament representing Woolwich I have had to fight a constant rearguard action against nationalisation, closure, privatisation, contractorisation and

wholesale relocation of Army support units in Woolwich which have traditionally provided an important source of employment for my constituents.

Two issues are, once again, causing major concern, both of them long-running sagas. One involves the Army cataloguing authority. Several years ago, it was proposed that it should be removed to Glasgow. There was a long argument about the proposal which made no sense in operational terms, and we ended up with a clear categorical assurance from the then Minister that there would be no removal to Glasgow. Therefore, we were surprised to find last year that the future of the Army cataloguing authority was once again in doubt and that the co-location of this unit with another unit certainly did not rule out its removal to Glasgow after all. Since then, there has been an ominous quiet about this proposal and there is anxiety among the staff. It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us something about that proposal.

Rather more serious is the matter of the future of the headquarters of the director of quality assurance. Those headquarters have been at Woolwich arsenal for many years and several years ago we were assured that they would be permanently located there. A great deal of work has gone into the reorganisation of the Woolwich arsenal site. A new head office building has been on the drawing board for years waiting to go ahead, but then suddenly we were told recently that the new Secretary of State for Defence had decided to examine the possibility of removing that headquarters operation to a site outside south-east England. For many of us, Woolwich without the Woolwich arsenal would be like Blackpool without Blackpool tower.

Apart from our emotional commitment, Woolwich has an unemployment rate of 16 per cent. and to remove a traditional source of employment would cause considerable anxiety. The long delay in making a final decision on these issues must be costly and is certainly causing considerable uncertainty to the staff. Anything firm and clear that the Minister could say would be extremely welcome.

I noted that in his speech the Minister picked out for the alliance share in the statutory attack on both opposition parties the concept of a battlefield nuclear weapon-free zone. As I am sure he knows, that was originally proposed by the Palme commission. Missing in what he said about that concept was that it is not designed to provide some sort of sanctuary from nuclear weapons in a clear, defined area. The concept of the battlefield nuclear weapon-free zone or corridor sought to remove some of the dangers of having battlefield nuclear systems actually deployed on the battlefield. In that situation they are vulnerable to a conventional attack.

That gives rise to the classic problem that commanders would have to face at an early stage in a conventional Soviet attack. They would have to decide whether the battlefield nuclear systems should be used or lost because of the risk of their being overrun. We are always assured that there is no risk, that there are adequate safeguards, and that there can be no release of nuclear systems without political consideration and political decisions. I have always found that a somewhat doubtful scenario against the background of a conventional conflict having broken out in central Europe. The idea that 16 nations can solemnly consider the possibility of using battlefield nuclear systems when the conflict is raging around them is somewhat unrealistic.

The difficulty that many of us see about battlefield nuclear weapons is that they reduce the nuclear threshold and change the nature of nuclear weapons from being systems of absolutely last resort to war fighting systems. In that sense, they are the most dangerous nuclear weapons that we have. NATO has substantially reduced its stockpile of shorter range nuclear warheads and the Montebello decision will reduce those stockpiles still further. The idea of a battlefield nuclear weapon-free zone is a logical extension of that approach which would reduce the risks of nuclear conflict in Europe.

The Minister's speech seemed extremely reassuring, not to say complacent, in the picture that he painted of the current state of our armed forces in general and the Army in particular. One did not get any sense of the squeeze on resources which is pointed to by analysts and experts. It was not possible to get the sense of a declining defence budget which is likely to reduce in real terms by about 7 per cent. over the next three years. In terms of equipment and manpower, one did not get a sense of the pressures which that declining budget will inevitably exert.

The problem of recruiting and, more importantly, of retaining the high quality of personnel that we need in the Army certainly did not come through in the Minister's speech. If we want that sort of quality we must pay, clothe, house and feed our service men in a way which keeps them up to the rising living standards of people outside the Army. That implies a rise in real unit costs in service manpower of about 2 to 3 per cent. and that adds to our difficulties about the manpower problem.

The sophistication of weapon systems about which the Minister spoke means that we shall place greater demands on skills and on highly trained and proficient service men. We did not hear from the Minister about the problem of demography, the fact that the numbers of recruitable people in the 17 to 30-year-old age group available to the armed forces will decline sharply from the late 1980s. In 1983, for example, there were almost 2 million 16 to 19-year-olds—1,929,000 to be precise. By 1995, that will drop to 1,351,000. That drop will add to the problems about the costs of recruitment and retention. Some of our European neighbours have the same difficulty and as a result some have increased and extended their conscription systems. That is not a possible option in Britain. Conscription is not a political possibility and the price that has to be paid in terms of the loss of efficiency is not a price that many military people would want to consider.

One of the difficulties coming through is the problem of retaining key staff. When we spend a lot of time, effort and money in training key people, to lose them early is very wasteful. What is called in the trade premature voluntary outflow does not affect only the Army, because, of course, this week it had a distinguished victim in the Royal Marines.

A number of reasons are given for people leaving the services early. Many of the military suggest that the overstretch of our forces is a major factor. They say that there is too much overseas duty, that the Army is being asked to do too much with limited resources and that this has an adverse impact on the lives of officers and men. Some suggest that it is due to the lack of the equipment that is necessary adequately to train people, and some point to the deficiencies of modern equipment.

Last week, an article in one of our national newspapers said that British soldiers are less well protected by their combat clothing than virtually any of the armies of our

[Mr. John Cartwright]

European neighbours. One defence industry source is quoted as saying that every army in western Europe will have flak jackets on general issue before the British Army. There were suggestions that the existing programme in the Ministry of Defence for purchasing flak jackets may have to be reduced because of spending cuts.

Mr. Stanley: Nonsense.

Mr. Cartwright: From a sedentary position the Minister says, "Nonsense." I hope that the Minister who replies to the debate will be able to deal with that point, because clearly that sort of suggestion has an impact on morale and that has an effect on the problem of people leaving early.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): The hon. Gentleman speaks about equipment for the Army. Now that he holds the position as principal defence spokesman for the alliance will he reconsider the placing of his name to early-day motion 342?

In that motion a company in my constituency called Multilift (UK) Ltd., which has recently obtained an order to supply the DROPS project to the Army, is alleged, together with its parent company Partek of Finland, to have supplied the Soviet Union in general and the Soviet army in particular. Is he aware that Multilift in Shrewsbury has categorically denied that this is the case and has said that its parent company Partek has less than 5 per cent. of its business supplying refuse disposal equipment to the Soviet Union and supplies no military equipment whatever? Before making his allegations, perhaps the hon. Gentleman would check his sources——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must make an intervention, not a long speech.

Mr. Cartwright: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the information. That early-day motion was tabled before the recess in response to information from a variety of sources and in response to concern on both sides of the House about the DROPS contract and the way in which it was placed. The sort of assurance that the hon. Gentleman has just given will be generally welcomed by all concerned.

Speaking about the outflow of key personnel leads me to remind the House that the Minister told us last July that there had been considerable concern in the Ministry of Defence about this problem and that specific studies were being undertaken into various aspects of early departure from the services. We were told in July that the results of these studies would be available by the year end. We have not yet seen them. Again, it would be useful if the Minister, when replying, would tell us the current position regarding those inquiries and what steps might result to deal with the problem and perhaps reduce it.

I should like to refer to the problem of the defence budget pressures on equipment, because some analysts tell us that the price of major weapons systems is rising at roughly twice the rate of inflation. Examination of past expenditure figures suggests that the cost of general defence procurement is 3 to 5 per cent. above the annual rate of inflation. That again will mean that a reducing defence budget will buy less equipment because of the problem of rising prices. The Government have told us that they hope to tackle the problem by achieving increased efficiency and competition in the supply of goods and services and by extending international collaboration to spread research and development costs and to reduce production costs through longer runs. Both are extremely welcome approaches, and I hope that they succeed. But I doubt very much that they will produce the sort of savings necessary to provide the sort of equipment and levels of manpower that we will need.

One is looking always for major savings in this defence area in order to fund all the improvements that all of us would like to see. It is hard to see where those savings might come, but there is one out-of-area commitment which simply must be re-examined, the commitment to fortress Falklands. The total costs attributable to the Falklands commitment between 1982 and 1994 have been estimated at £4·65 billion at 1983-84 prices. Much of that expenditure is now irrecoverable. It is the essential replacement of war losses that goes into capital investment. But the running costs of the Falklands garrison are now put at £135 million a year, and much of that could be more usefully redirected into the NATO commitment if our fortress Falklands commitment could be reduced or, better still, liquidated. I should like a very much higher priority to be given to diplomatic efforts to find a fairer solution to that problem.

It seems to many of us on both sides of the House that there is no escaping the need for a thorough review of defence priorities. I should like to see that review as part of a European exercise. It is essential that the European members of NATO examine the shape and size of their forces and try to agree on the extent and nature of a more effective division of labour. That would cover the obvious issues of forces currently deployed, the availability of reserves, equipment procurement and research and development. All these things have been discussed regularly over the years, but trying to achieve them is much more important and urgent now than ever before because of the continuing debate and continuing doubt about the extent of the United States manpower commitment to western Europe.

I believe that predictions of a total United States withdrawal are very much exaggerated unless we have a British Government who seek massively to renege on their commitments to NATO, when we might well see a substantial and dramatic change in American policies. But without that we have to face the fact that there will be continuing pressures on the American defence budget and hence growing pressures to reduce the manpower commitment to Europe. In conversations that I have had with him, the supreme allied commander Europe, General Rogers, has given me the clear impression that we would be unwise to assume that the Americans will go on committing 326,000 ground troops to Europe for the foreseeable future. If we are to encourage the United States to maintain and effective commitment to Europe, we have to show that Europe is determined to be doing more to defend itself.

We cannot go on pretending that everything can continue as it is at the moment against a background of a fall in defence expenditure. To do that would be to put greater pressures on our service men than is fair or reasonable. There will obviously be no major defence review this side of the coming general election, but I believe that it must and will come soon after that election, whoever forms the next Government.

6.48 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): It is a particular pleasure for me to be able on this occasion to follow the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). It allows me to congratulate him most warmly on his rejoining the Select Committee. He and I were on it when it started in 1980 and his contribution then was very valuable and sensible. It was because his views were largely so sensible in this area that he must have felt constrained, with others of his friends, to leave the Labour party when it started proposing the sort of loony rubbish that we have heard tonight and that he could no longer stand. So we all look forward to having him back and contributing again to the defence debate, and long may he this time remain a member of the Committee.

May I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman, in slightly different vein, on taking on the arduous task of defence responsibility for both his own party and the Liberal party. This, it is stressed, is only temporary, and for that he must be somewhat grateful. In view of the sensible speech that the hon. Member has just made, has made in the past and will no doubt make in the future, and the largely sensible comments of the leader of his party, and comparing them with one or two of the remarks of the Liberal Members, higlighted in their conference last summer when they were propounding even more loony policies than are coming out of the Liberal party at the moment, it will be a difficult circle for him to square, and I shall watch with some affectionate amusement his attempts to do that and convince us that he really does speak for both those parties whose defence policies are so different.

I should like to make two brief points about the Army and our forces as I have been fortunate to see them in the past months. Before I do that, however, I have to put on record my utter disgust at the sheer irresponsibility of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on the radio yesterday. There was a minor accident involving the sliding of a large vehicle off the road into a ditch which the hon. Gentleman —on reflection, he must know that he was going too far —compared with Chernobyl. Two things need to be said about this.

First, the hon. Gentleman said that it was crazy that anyone should be moving military equipment about in the winter. Will he please tell the Russians that? If he can get an agreement that they will stop the moment the first snowflake falls and do nothing in the military field until the spring sun has melted all their snows, I am certain that my right hon. Friend will be very keen to accommodate them in this matter. But as long as we have to be ready all the time, prepared all the time, and when our defence forces have at all times to be at complete readiness for any untoward attack, vehicles will have to be moved in the snow and ice and there will be the odd mishap.

I entirely agree with the Ministry of Defence policy never to state publicly what it is moving and where. That can only help the enemy. Our people do not need to know; they just need to know that they are properly defended. But even if we were moving any form of nuclear warhead, for the hon. Gentleman to compare the likelihood of a similar accident with an inert, unarmed warhead, with a fully working, unsafe reactor can only frighten the ignorant. Since he is not one of the ignorant, it is too irresponsible for me to let the matter pass.

The Select Committee has had the chance to see quite a bit of the British Army in the last two or three months, most notably in the exercise in Oman to which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State referred. We were there for the large part of the active bit of that exercise and I want to add my congratulations on the way that our services mounted that exercise. It was an outstanding achievement in joint service co-operation. From the initial planning to the mounting of the operation—the getting out of the Tornados for the first time, flying in a single stage of about 11 hours from the United Kingdom with two refuellings — was an amazingly good technical achievement. The planning of the joint staffs to get the naval forces, the Royal Marines, the Army and the Air Force all there at the right time, with the capability to do their job, drew unbounded admiration from everybody who watched it.

We went out before dawn for the major day of the exercise. As dawn broke we saw the naval task force about three miles offshore. We saw the Marine commandos come in and land across the beaches, with the naval helicopters bringing in the support, the live artillery, the weapons and the equipment that were needed. Later that morning we saw the drop of the 2nd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment. All these operations were carried out with the sort of professional skill that we have come to expect but which nevertheless we admire and which ought to be put on record.

The whole of that exercise has done nothing but good, not only for the confidence of our services but for the respect in which the professionalism of those services is held throughout the western world. In addition, the co-operation of a friendly Government in that very sensitive area of the world, which incidentally was watched by many representatives of the other Gulf states, can only have increased the awareness of potential enemies or aggressors in that part of the world that we are prepared to help our friends. We have the capability. My goodness me, if they try anything, we will do it, and do it well.

We were in Oman for four or five days and during the rest of our time we had a chance to see not only the Omani services at work but those many individuals from the three services here who are serving with the Sultan of Oman's forces either on loan or on contract. We met many of them. Their morale was high. They are adding a professional dimension to the Sultan's forces which are growing in efficiency day by day and are being taken over more and more by Omani-trained and Omani native officers and other ranks who are bringing those forces into a state of readiness second to none in the Gulf. The work that is being done by our service men out there on contract is absolutely exemplary.

The second point which I want to raise about the armed forces involves the Brigade of Gurkhas. We had the opportunity, while we were in Hong Kong, to visit their training establishment and to see the high state of their morale and their professionalism in the job that they do in training Ghurkhas to stand side by side with some of the finest units in the British Army.

There is a problem behind that—the ending of the lease in Hong Kong in 10 years' time. The Select Committee has been addressing itself to that problem for some time. We have been concerned about the future of the Brigade of Gurkhas, and 18 months ago we asked the MOD to outline its thinking to us. That prompted an announcement by the then Secretary of State, my right

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hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), in September 1985 that there would a continuing role for the Gurkhas after 1997 within the British Army. So it is from that basis that we start. He also said that the final size and shape of the Gurkhas would turn on operational resource factors facing the entire British Army at the time, which it was too early to foresee at that stage.

Given the time which those now joining can expect to serve, and given the unique contribution of the Gurkhas to our armed forces and the importance of this relationship not only to ourselves but to the kingdom of Nepal, the Committee has said that during the present Session of Parliament it will look into the whole question of how some of the political problems can be addressed. I hope that this will be of help to the House when we report and to the Ministery of Defence which is still considering this matter from many points of view.

Speaking for myself, may I say how delighted I am that that remark was made about the Gurkhas remaining with us after 1997 and how strongly I feel personally that nothing should be done to alter that? I am very fortunate and proud to have the serving battalion of Gurkhas in the United Kingdom in my constituency. I shall spend a day with them in a week or two's time. I have seen them before and I know well how professionally they operate alongside the rest of the British Army. Indeed, we know the sterling service that they performed when they went as a unit of the British Army to the Falklands conflict.

There will be difficulties. There are problems that have to be solved, but the knowledge that we shall have the Gurkhas as part of our fighting forces for the foreseeable future after we have given Hong Kong back to the Chinese is a great comfort to me. I am certain that it is a great comfort to all those who know how well and how loyally the Gurkhas have served us over the years.

6.55 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): So far the debate has been quite interesting but I should like to issue a warning to Conservative Members that it is unwise to rubbish the statements of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). We want an adult debate, not an infantile debate. Whether Conservative Members like it or not, a debate is going on amongst the ordinary citizens of this country as to what the role of the conventional forces will be and whether we are to have a role as a nuclear nation. That debate will not go away. If Conservative Members were to follow the early statements of their leader, they would welcome the debate. Certainly I welcome it.

I am not a unilateralist or a pacifist but we have to get rid of the original thinking on the Government side which could be dangerous, namely, the Field Marshal Earl Haigh type of mentality that led us into disaster in the first war. Conservative Members should remember that in defence there is evolution. Situations change, weaponry changes and tactics change, so defence should not follow and never has followed rigid policies.

I am pleased that the ordinary serving members have been mentioned because this matter gives some concern. Conversations I have had with men serving in the regular forces are somewhat frightening. Because of the large number of people who are unemployed, about 3 million, it is becoming increasingly difficult for those who have proudly served their corps or their regiment, in whatever rank, for 16 to 22 years to get jobs on leaving the services. Without doubt these men are exceptionally well qualified to take jobs in civilian life but I am beginning to discern some discrimination.

The matter was brought to my attention by officers who, after retirement from the forces, applied for civilian jobs in various parts of the public service—for example, with police authorities. Because they have received an army pension at the age of 47 to 50 they are considered not to be the type of person to employ even though they may have superior qualifications. I name Northumbria police. I understand that Cleveland constabulary and the Devon and Cornwall constabulary have taken a similar view. I have referred just to the police but other parts of the public service are also denying those men employment because they have served in and obtained pensions from Her Majesty's forces. The matter requires attention. The Minister should send a quiet word to the responsible authorities. I might add that these decisions are not all being made by Left-wing loonies.

The conditions for the serving men are, without any doubt, far superior to the conditions when I and some of my colleagues served in the armed forces. However, there is still a grouse about housing conditions. I am aware that regimental welfare officers are doing their best. However, the main problem arises from the fact that some of the houses that were built 30 or 40 years ago now require modernisation. The Minister may care to consider that and decide whether any financial resources can be allocated for the improvement of housing conditions.

I was heartened by the Minister's statement about equipment. There is no doubt that the amount of equipment going to the regular and the territorial forces is excellent. I have seen no signs of inferior equipment or any lack of equipment required by the personnel. I was especially impressed by the training efforts that take place within the Territorial Army.

I live in the northern area from which two out of five of the people who serve in the armed forces at present originate. Catterick and Otterburn are in this northern area, and there is a long tradition relating to the armed forces because in depressions, in wartime and during periods of relative prosperity, there has never been a problem of obtaining recruits. The Minister mentioned the 200th anniversary of the Corps of Royal Engineers. However, there are regiments in the north that can claim a foundation of 312 years or more. The Royal Engineers are simply apprentices as yet.

One day I should like the Minister to visit the territorial battalions in the area. I should like to extend an invitation to him to come on a regimental day and see the St. George's day parade of the 6th Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. If he comes, he will see the equipment and the vigour of the men on display and he will be very proud of that.

I would also like the Minister to consider the speech made before Christmas by the senior officer responsible for the Territorial Army. When addressing the Northern Territorial Association, the senior officer made a prophetic statement. He advised the officers responsible for training to remember that the men, while they are being trained to a degree of efficiency, are also civilians. They have a life to lead beyond the armed forces. He said that over-training may be a factor that could discourage recruitment. In other words, he said that the men should

be trained but that the training should be balanced with an interest and a belief in the service of the Territorial Army. I wonder whether the Corps of Royal Marines is possibly relying too much on training and de-humanising people to the extent that people have to have another life as well as a commitment to that magnificent corps.

One of the problems faced by the Territorial Army is how to deal with recruits who wish to serve in the Territorial Army, but who are unemployed. A greater number of recruits would join the Territorial Army from among the unemployed if we were to straighten out the financial position relative to deductions of unemployment benefit while the unemployed serve a day, several days or parts of days with the Territorial Army. That problem has never been satisfactorily resolved. It is unfair that some people in employment serving in the Territorial Army do not have daily pay or salary deducted yet they can rightly claim the appropriate allowances. That is a deterring factor in the recruitment from among the unemployed.

I understand that in the northern region there is a good core of Territorial Army officers waiting for other ranks to be recruited. In the north-east—and on Tyneside in particular — it may now be an appropriate time to consider the formation of another infantry battalion. I am sure that that would soon get up to strength and that there would be no problems of officer recruitment.

The British people have always had some regard for the armed forces. There is a tradition because of our imperial role and because people have had sons, brothers, uncles or grandfathers who have been killed in the service of the country or who have served the country. We like to know what is happening in the Army and we want to see its profile kept at the right level. We want the best of the British Army to be displayed.

In conclusion, there should be a little more swank on display than has previously been the case. That swank could be in the best interests and be one of the best morale builders for the Army. I hope that the Minister will consider my point. I could carry on at length and describe my experiences with the Western European Union on which I served for seven years as a delegate pursuing harmonisation. However, perhaps we can debate that at some other time.

7.6 pm

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) on his remarks about the unemployed and the Territorial Army. There are difficulties, but I am certain that they can be easily surmounted. I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that the public is concerned about defence. Although that may not figure as the major issue, it will certainly be an important feature in the next election. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman on that point.

Mr. Garrett: I must apologise to the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) for not giving full attention to his speech. I am a member of a Standing Committee and a whisper has reached my ears that I should go and vote in the Committee. I hope that it will not be considered discourteous if I leave the Chamber in two or three minutes' time.

Dr. Glyn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that explanation; otherwise I might have thought that he was leaving for other reasons.

In common with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), I have a vested interest as I represent the garrison constituency of Windsor and Maidenhead, and have similar problems.

I want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on the improvements that he has managed to achieve in the services. I may be wrong — if I am perhaps I will be corrected—but I believe that some of the improvements have been achieved not only by injecting more money but by making economies in the service. Many of the improvements are very important. Some may be minor, for example, the improvements in night sights, but nevertheless they are important.

Although this is a debate on the Army, as many hon. Members have observed, it has developed into a more general defence debate. I do not think that that is in any way to be discouraged. After all, the Army is a major part of NATO and of our defences. To a large extent, the NATO defences are dependent on the Army as opposed to the other forces. The other armed forces are not vital to the support of NATO.

According to the *NATO Review 1986:*

"the Soviet aim could be the improvement of their conventional forces, in quantity and quality, to support a strategy and policy of peace by dominance".

The review continues by saying that the Soviet conventional forces such as FROG-7 bring a

"realisation of the growing disparity between the balance of forces"

in the Soviet Union and our own. This includes the ability to move troops from other areas such as the border with China, the Urals and various other parts of Russia. It is possible that the forces at their command are much greater than we imagined them to be.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) referred to nuclear weapons. He fails to recognise that the reason for 40 years of peace is the independent nuclear deterrent. The hon. Member for Woolwich suggested that, if we were to change our policy, our American allies, who have been so loyal and generous to this country and to NATO, would withdraw altogether from NATO. That would be a major disaster. Our forces, even combined with United States forces, are probably superior in quality but numerically they are inferior to the Warsaw pact countries. To what extent can the Warsaw pact countries fit nuclear battlefield weapons on to soft vehicles and tanks?

I regard chemical warfare and its effect on the efficiency of our forces as a very important issue. The efficiency of an army that has to fight wearing anti-chemical clothing is grossly impaired. It is stated on pages 19 and 21 that the number of countries that have chemical capabilities have increased from five in 1977 to 15. We have seen horrible pictures of the results of the mustard gas warfare in the far east. Let us hope that it will never be used in Europe.

Will the Minister tell the House how much advance notice there will be of the use of these weapons? When will the troops have to put on this very heavy and difficult equipment? Will they have advance notice of one hour, or two hours or more? Clothing of that nature must decrease efficiency.

A great deal of work has been done on the interchangeability of weapons and spare parts in wartime between our NATO allies. If, say, a tank lacks a piece of equipment, it is no use offering something that is measured

[Dr. Glyn]

in millimetres instead of inches, because it would be quite useless. Missiles and equipment must be interchangeable throughout NATO.

Paragraph 4.14 of the Defence Estimates states that we have 100,000 ground forces available for the defence of our homeland. Comparisons are invidious, but I am told that in Denmark 100,000 civilians are armed with rifles. They know the people who live in their villages, and if they saw strangers they would know how to react. If Denmark can arm 100,000 men with rifles, it makes the number of men who are armed in our country look rather small. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said that the numbers are being increased. Paragraph 4.15 states that three out of the new infantry battalions are to be used for home defence. It is most important to defend one's own country and to ensure that people are properly trained to do that job. We do not want a private army; we want properly organised forces with modern equipment that can be used at very short notice. The age of people does not matter too much, provided that they are fit. What matters is that they should be trained and properly organised.

May I refer, as a purely domestic matter, to the rebuilding of one of the barracks in my constituency? Apart from Combermere barracks, which is the Household Cavalry barracks, Victoria barracks is being rebuilt. I am pleased that at last a start has been made upon its rebuilding. We were held up by a minor problem —the moving of a very old main sewer that ran under the barracks. For security reasons it had to be replaced.

Unfortunately, the contractors chose a steel sheet piling apparatus that annoyed the residents and did great damage in the locality. It caused a rift between the citizens and those who were rebuilding the barracks. Unfortunately, the structural engineers, Sir Alexander Gibbs, approved the contractors' methods. I contacted the person with ultimate responsibility, the chairman of the water board, Roy Watts, and within a short time the noise and inconvenience had stopped and another method was employed. I am told that this will not delay the final date of completion of the barracks. A battalion of footguards will then be installed once more in proper quarters.

Windsor will be all the richer for the presence of that battalion. It will be easier for it to mount guard every day. I understand that, apart from completion of the barracks, the delightful grass square is to be preserved. Those fine barracks will be worthy of the Household Division . It will be able to serve Windsor in comfortable quarters for a very long time. I hope that the Minister will support me, as have all previous Ministers, and ensure that there are no hitches and that the barracks are completed on time.

7.18 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): During the speech of the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) I was tempted to call out, "Ordure, ordure." I regret the problems that had to be faced in replacing the barracks and the relocation of the sewer and I am delighted to hear that they have been sorted out.

There are a number of points that I want to make, and I notice that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement is twitching because of the long printouts that I am holding. I promise him that most of them are sheets of blank paper. I cannot find any way of stopping my computer from printing out two lines on one page and then changing to the next sheet of paper to print out the next two lines. I promise the House that I do not intend to read it all out. I would never dream of abusing your authority, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by doing any such thing.

Defence is an important subject and I regret that the contributions to the debate relating to the general approach to strategy, doctrine and the equipment used by our forces are coming mainly from the Labour Benches. I do not understand how the Conservatives can complacently lean back and accept the NATO strategy of flexible response given the age of that strategy and given the fact that defence technology does not stand still. Moreover, the strategy of the Warsaw pact does not stand still. Yet, here we are, in 1987 arguing on the basis that, somehow or other, a strategy that is almost 20 years old is the correct strategy to defend Europe.

I can assure the House that that view is not shared by the people to whom I spoke to when I visited NATO headquarters shortly before Christmas. General Rogers certainly does not believe that there is a sufficiently strong conventional defence on the western plain of Europe.

Politics in the United States has certainly not stood still. As a result of the recent elections in the United States the leadership in the House of Representatives has changed and there are different people in charge of important committees. Senator Nunn has been outspoken in his view that the other countries in Europe ought to play their full part — a more significant role — in the conventional defence of Europe.

General Rogers considers that the Warsaw pact forces have a 6:1 superiority over NATO forces in Europe in numerical if not operational terms. We should address ourselves to that problem. It is not good enough for the Minister to stand up and say how well he did last year in increasing the numbers in the Territorial Army by a thousand. Does the Minister believe that he is addressing the main problem?

We are well aware that the standard military doctrine is that if one is in a defensive position it takes a 3:1 superiority to overcome that dug-in defensive position. That is the position that NATO has taken. The fact that the Warsaw pact has a numerical superiority of 6:1— effectively it is probably 4·5:1—means that NATO is not in a good position. We must find the additional conventional forces to commit to NATO.

We are not helped by the kneejerk reactions that we get from the Conservatives. We know that we have to cut our coat according to the cloth, and if that cloth is such that our primary role is within NATO—the Scotland/Iceland trench and the British Army of the Rhine—we accept that. But if there is a grandiose vision that the use of Trident D5 missiles overrides that role it is too complacent. It is not in the best interests of the defence of this nation.

I listen with surprise to some of the statements made by Caspar Weinberger. I do not know of any radar system in existence that can detect the difference between the Union flag and the Stars and Stripes on the nose of a Trident D5 missile. Mr. Weinberger seems to be gloriously unaware of that and the way in which we could drag America into a nuclear holocaust, against its will, because nobody in Moscow will worry too much about which flag is painted on that missile. If the missile is incoming, Russia will react.

The Labour party believes that we must spend money on the conventional defence of Europe. We need to

increase our ability to fight a conventional war and we need to give a testimony of our commitment to that. I wonder at the complacency of the Ministry of Defence. An army cannot fight without ammunition.

I am privileged to have in my constituency the royal ordnance factory of Birtley and the work force of that factory is concerned because ammunition orders that were expected have not appeared. Unless those orders appear the pre-ordering of raw materials or specialist metals cannot take place. I am told that the factory has not received an order for 105FD ammunition—I do not know what they will fire out of the Abbott gun when they run out of the existing stock of shells. Without extra supplies of 105FDs no ammunition will be available for practice use and so on. We must have those orders.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) mentioned that, significantly, the Minister failed to make any mention of the SP70 weapon system—I find that very odd. Britain, Germany and Italy are, as far as we in this House are aware—we have had no statement to the contrary—committed to replacing the 105 Abbott gun with the 155 mm SP70. That weapon has several advantages, one of them being that it can fire the same ammunition as the 155 mm FH70 main battlefield howitzer. It would be a logical thing to rationalise ammunition.

We have heard nothing about it and I wonder why. Is it because the Germans have gone sour about the idea? Certainly there was some press speculation that the Germans were insisting on changes of specification and other things and that the background to those changes was not that they were needed but that the Germans were trying to delay the system being introduced. Is it that Rheinmetall is not capable of making the shells? I have no evidence to show that Rheinmetall has ever managed to deliver the FH70 ammunition that was ordered from it. I know that the Army needs about 50,000 rounds of FH70 ammunition for the coming year, but so far no order has been placed. No order has been placed at Birtley and as far as I am aware no order has gone to Germany. I look forward to the Minister's reply and I hope that he will be able to tell me whether the Germans have ever delivered any ammunition.

If the Army needs 50,000 rounds of FH70 ammunition, and if it asks Birtley to tender for that order, it will be met with a keen response. It will get a product that complies, in all ways, with the specifications, because Birtley has successfully made that ammunition for years. I hope that the Minister will go ahead and order that ammunition and he will also order 105FD ammunition that is needed for the Abbott gun.

Three years ago, when General Rogers gave evidence to the Senate Defence Committee, he said that one of the areas about which he was worried was the readiness of artillery in Europe. He said that gun crews had the opportunity to fire only one practice round per month. In my opinion that is a good way of ensuring that the artillery is inaccurate, if not downright dangerous to one's forward troops.

I hope that the Minister will give us the assurance that he will place the ammunition orders. I hope that he will assure the House that there are sufficient rounds to enable the proper practice that will enable the Royal Artillery to achieve the levels of accuracy for which it is famed.

I am also told that we are short of 76 mm shells as well. Where is the order for that? What is most puzzling is that the Minister did not mention the royal ordnance factories. We are aware that various companies have shown an interest in those factories and that such companies are trundling around the royal ordnance factories. We are aware of the ability of those factories to supply the Army with its needs—the Under-Secretary will recall that we went on about that at great length in the Committee on that particular Bill. The Labour party is concerned about the royal ordnance factories. We want the ammunition that the Army needs as well as the ability to produce it safely, at a reasonable price and to a standard that does not pose a hazard to the troops using it. We are not convinced that the Minister's proposals or what is apparently happening will give us that. I hope that the Minister will tell us tonight whether he intends to dispose of the royal ordnance factories before the next general election, and if so what he is doing about that. A statement would have been welcome.

Indeed, I would have applied for a debate under Standing Order No. 20 but for the fact that I knew that this debate would be held today and that my application would have been automatically refused as a result. However, that does not mean that the Minister does not need to say anything about the matter. It is important, and has been the subject of much press speculation during the past week. It is certainly of great concern to my constituents and to the constituents of every hon. Member with a royal ordnance factory in his area. I therefore hope that the Minister will answer that point tonight.

I fully support what the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli have said about the efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism of the British Army. We are proud of it and it is entiled to our support. However, that support should be given on the basis that I have outlined and should not be the subject of ministerial complacency.

7.31 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam). During the Christmas period I visited his constituency and saw the excellent Metro-Centre there. But it is also a pleasure to follow him because of his remarks about the ammunition orders for Birtley. I spent a great deal of my youth in that town, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's words will be well received by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State.

I particularly welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about the Territorial Army, which is expanding well. Before too long we should examine the need to give NATO-committed Territorial Army infantry battalions an armoured personnel carrier capacity. Their susceptibility to air strikes is no less than that of a regular soldier. Moreover, it just so happens that the engines for those vehicles are almost certain to be made in my constituency. Thus I have a vested interest, but I look forward to the day when our Territorial Army battalions are armour plated.

The Labour party's emphasis on conventional defence will have to withstand a lot of scrutiny as the election approaches. Indeed, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in its publication "The Military Balance", has shown that Warsaw pact tanks and tactical aircraft have a superiority over NATO of 2:1 and that Warsaw pact artillery has a superiority of 3:1. Consequently, it is not fair to claim that our forces are

[Mr. Derek Conway]

matched in any way. Moreover, many serving soldiers will want to know what response there could be to the deployment of battlefield chemical and biological weapons. If we cannot retaliate with nuclear weapons, our front-line troops will have no protection, and are no doubt well aware of that fact.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has attended the debate, because the new Sir John Moore barracks in Winchester was opened just before Christmas. It was moved from Shrewsbury, which was a matter of great regret to the people of that town. The barracks will be sadly missed. The new barracks forms a splendid training centre, and the people of Shropshire wish it and the people of Winchester well.

In Shropshire we now have a revamped Territorial Army battalion in the 5th Battalion The Light Infantry, in which I serve as a major. The new Yorkshire battalion, the 8th Battalion The Light Infantry, is wished well by the county. Indeed, the move towards county identities for Territorial Army battalions will help the civilian population to identify with them, as well as helping the units themselves.

Before Christmas, I was privileged to attend the annual general meeting of the Shropshire cadet force, as Member for Shrewsbury. Hon. Members have already praised our regular service personnel and many of the Territorial Army units, but a special word needs to be said about those people, particularly adults, who devote a great deal of time to our cadet forces. Their work is unpaid, but those adults give young people an outlet for their energies and often an opportunity to sample military training. Indeed, many of the cadets go into regular service with the armed forces. Such work is not only a gesture to the community but helps young people to decide whether a military career is for them.

As the economic climate improves, more and more potential and serving Territorial Army soldiers and officers will need the co-operation of employers. Perhaps the mammoth procurement power of the Ministry of Defence should be turned towards considering whether we need a voluntary employer's code on Territorial Army and reservist employee involvement. Such a code could be seen as a gesture of national responsibility from employers who already receive enormous Ministry of Defence contracts. As has often been said in Territorial Army discussions, some employers are far from encouraging when it comes to allowing people time off to attend annual camps. However, fortunately, the majority of employers are good, and encourage such activities.

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) made a very good speech and demonstrated that the armed forces need not be a political football to be kicked around between the different parties. People in the armed forces support parties of all political persuasions and it is only right that that should be recognised. The hon. Gentleman's point about DHSS contributions being a problem was very telling. For several years we have been promised that the problem would be resolved, but it has still not been resolved, and it is causing immense problems for those who are unemployed and who lose their benefit when they claim pay for a Territorial Army training day. There is inevitably a delay because of all the bureaucracy to ensure that money is paid correctly. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has taken that point on board.

In previous debates I mentioned the possibility of national service in the Territorial Army along Swiss lines. But, as happens whenever national service is suggested, that idea was pooh-poohed rapidly by both friend and foe alike. The falling birth rate will clarify the personnel position towards the end of this century, but in the next 10 years there is likely to be a 25 per cent. drop in the number of young men of military age. Moreover, I understand that there will be 1 million fewer men aged between 20 and 29 at the turn of the century. That is bound to have an effect on normal recruiting patterns. A switch to a conventional defence only policy, as advocated by the Opposition, will almost inevitably mean that the required levels of manpower can be achieved only by compulsory military service. I look forward to that debate being held at a future Labour party conference.

I crave the indulgence of the House, because I rarely like to speak for more than 10 minutes but on this occasion wish to do so. I must ask my right hon. and hon. Friends who are waiting to speak to be patient. Just before Christmas a company in my constituency was attacked in a debate on 12 December on defence projects and exports. Sadly, none of those hon. Members who criticised that company had the courtesy to advise me that they were about to do so. However, before today's debate I took the liberty of writing to the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) advising them that I intended to raise the subject of the DROPS contract. I refer to column 712 of the *Official Report* for 12 December 1986 and to early-day motion 342, which also contains the name of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright).

In that debate, the hon. Member for Yeovil made several specific allegations, some of which were echoed by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North. From the company's point of view at least, it is important that the record should be made clear. He made a number of allegations especially to my hon. Friend the Minister that the Minister of Defence was allowing

"an unwitting export . . . to the Soviet Union."

Yet the Multilift hooklift mark IV system, which is the point of the controversy, will specifically not be offered to any Eastern bloc country. That has never been proposed and such a thing has never been substantiated. Even if Multilift wished to export that system—clearly it does not—it would be subject to stringent export licensing control from the Ministry of Defence and from the Department of Trade and Industry. Accusations along that line were wholly without basis.

Secondly, it was claimed that the Multilift system

"bears a startling resemblance to the system proposed by Boughton."

The hon. Member for Yeovil said:

"There may have been some leakage of technical information from Boughton." — [*Official Report*, 12 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 712.]

That suggests that there has been a bit of jiggery-pokery behind the scenes, yet no claims have ever been made against Multilift in my constituency. Multilift retained top London patent lawyers to ensure that there was no infringement of anyone's patent. Boughton has been

repeatedly urged by the Ministry of Defence to enter discussions on allegations of breach of intellectual property. That has not been done at any stage. Therefore, it is not on for the hon. Members for Yeovil and for Woolwich, who added his name to the early-day motion, to continue to make those accusations without substantiating them.

The hon. Member for Yeovil suggested that Multilift was a supplier to the Soviet truck company, Kamaz. Multilift has never supplied hydraulic systems to Kamaz and its parent group Partek AB, which is based in Finland, has never engaged in any work for an Eastern bloc military organisation. Multilift staff have told me that categorically. If any hon. Member has evidence to the contrary, he is duty bound to produce it and to give my hon. Friends at the Ministry an opportunity to examine the case.

The hon. Member for Yeovil claimed that it was evident that the contractor chosen by the Ministry of Defence supplied similar systems to the Soviet Union, probably to the Soviet army. That accusation had no basis of truth whatever and I challenge him to substantiate it.

The question remains whether the Ministry of Defence should have chosen a Finnish-owned company to be involved in the tender process for the DROPS — ammunition lift — project. Partek AB was formed in 1898. It is a public company in Finland with 13,000 shareholders, 38 per cent. of whom are private individuals. It could not be argued with the best Machiavellian mind in the world that it is a Soviet front organisation trying to inveigle its way into the Ministry of Defence supply organisation. It is a long-standing, highly reputable, substantially privately owned company. Its activities are in minerals and concrete production, building and insulation materials and hydraulic mounted equipment. Less than 5 per cent. of its Finnish turnover is with Eastern bloc countries, supplying them with hydraulics for refuse collection vehicles. Its hydraulic and commercial systems were developed were in the 1960s. If the basis of the argument is that we should not be involved in that, we might as well prevent British Gas from supplying gas to Army barracks in Britain because it is involved in a pipeline with the Soviet Union. The suggestion that normal commerical contracts should not go on with the Soviet Union has never been proposed by any party in this House.

Multilift, the company in my constituency which is part of the Finnish group, was formed in 1968. It has 160 employees with a turnover of £12 million. It makes not only the military equipment which is being offered to the Ministry of Defence but also refuse collection vehicles— in which it has a 30 per cent. market share — and demountables. It has more than a 50 per cent. share of the United Kingdom market whereas Boughton, whose supporters have been so highly critical of the Multilift contract, has less than 20 per cent. of the United Kingdom commercial market.

That must be seen by the House against the criticism that Multilift has come out of nowhere to grab a contract to which it has no right — or so the opponents of Multilift and the supporters of Boughton will have it. For Multilift, DROPS is a 100 per cent. United Kingdom procurement and manufacturing project. Fortunately, it brings 50 extra jobs to Shrewsbury and I cannot for the life of me understand why the Liberal party has opposed it so vehemently without ever checking with the Multilift management or myself to see whether their repeated allegations have any base whatever.

Multilift is an excellent company with a good management team whom I meet regularly. Its members are dynamic and have integrity. To suggest that they would have any part in supplying the Soviet army with equipment is plainly ridiculous.

Sadly, the controversy on the DROPS project will not go away. There has been a "Panorama" programme on it and countless questions on the Order Paper from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour), myself and other hon. Members. A paragraph or two about the basis of the DROPS report may help lay this particular ghost to rest.

Eleven years ago, in 1975, Multilift supplied to the Ministry of Defence a special demountable for handling 20 ft long flat-racks. It was put on trial in the United Kingdom and Germany and proved to be all right on highway work but was not suited to cross-country conditions. Between 1976 and 1978 the Ministry of Defence examined the products of all appropriate United Kingdom demountable equipment manufacturers and a wide range of equipment was tested. In 1978 the Ministry of Defence purchased four commercial demountables from Boughton and they were fitted to in-service Foden trucks. That was to help assess the requirement for the Army. At that stage it was a feasibility study and it may well have been rejected.

From 1978-82, tests indicated that DROPS offered productivity savings, and a requirement was formulated and later that year the Ministry of Defence issued a statement of requirement to 43 companies, giving them 20 weeks for a response.

In 1983, Multilift was picked for trialling along with Powell Duffryn in second place. Heathfield Engineering got third place, using a Multilift lifting system, and Volvo got fourth place, again with Multilift kit. Boughton, the subject of all the controversy, got fifth place. Foden and Scammell were chosen by the Ministry of Defence as the two main chassis contractors.

In 1985, after a year's trialling, the Multilift system was chosen and in 1986 Foden and Scammell were confirmed as the main chassis contractors. Boughton's case has been given substantial airing on television and in the Chamber, both in debate and via questions. In 1978, Boughton was in a favoured position, having supplied the equipment for the feasibility study. Obviously, seeing a major requirement developing, Boughton adopted a strategy which, sadly for the company, turned out to be wrong. The company went for a new "vehicle system" incorporating many new and radical ideas which were subsequently not accepted. It expected the Ministry of Defence's DROPS specification to be written around its vehicle ideas which, again, sadly did not happen.

Boughton designed a new load handling system that could be used only with its own vehicle. That, again, turned out not to be the case. Having taken so many false premises along that product development, Boughton surely has no right to expect a favoured position. Its commercial equipment was purchased for concept trials by the Government and the Ministry of Defence eventually left the solution of the loading to manufacturer response, who, of course, had given performance parameters to work to.

[Mr. Derek Conway]

My hon. Friend the Minister and the noble Lord Trefgarne have examined this case again and again. There is no evidence of foul play, and the Auditor-General will report to Parliament on the DROPS project in due course. No doubt the matter will be aired again then. My hon. Friend the Minister and his Department should now consider that Boughton is one of two finalists for a new 4 × 4 vehicle. I hope that it will not be given the contract simply to keep it quiet or happy and to calm friends in high places.

Boughton lost the DROPS contract to Shrewsbury in an open and fair competition. I say to its supporters, especially those in the Liberal party, that it is now time to put up or shut up.

7.48 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I thank the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) for recognising that people in the armed forces vote for all parties and that the armed forces are not the preserve of one particular party. Thirty-five years ago I was in a tank crew as a national service man on the north German plain, like many others of my age group. Therefore, I remain especially sensitive to people who say that the British Army of the Rhine is vulnerable to some sort of threat. I refer to the exchange between my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and the Minister on the subject of a short-range Soviet nuclear capability against 1 Corps.

What consideration has been given to the assessment that may have been made in Moscow after Chernobyl of what would happen to Mother Russia herself if a nuclear holocaust or nuclear attack were to be launched against western Europe? We have had enough trouble with caesium 137 in the Outer Hebrides and the mountains of Wales. Given a prevailing south-west wind, is there a cow, a calf, a sheep or a lamb anywhere between Minsk and Leningrad that could graze safely? There is not. Three days after Russia used nuclear weapons in western Europe there would be considerable trouble in the Russian homeland. That, rather than the British possession of nuclear weapons, is the safeguard against the vulnerability argument with which the Minister tried to persuade my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli.

What assessment has been made, in the light both of what we know has happened since Chernobyl and the agricultural difficulties that we have faced, of a Russian attack anywhere in western Europe on Russia herself?

Secondly, I should like to say a word about procurement. Today the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement answered the question:

"if he will hold discussions with Plessey about the eventual control of high-technology development as a result of its £1,100 million agreement with Boeing; and whether it will pass to American control."

He answered, "I shall answer shortly." I make no complaint about the answer. All I ask for is a considered reply. This is a difficult subject and it is better that it should be considered rather than answered within three days.

In the same breath I draw to the Minister's attention the problem of Electronic Data Systems, on which I have tabled questions and about which David Rose of *The Guardian* has written. I refer to a memorandum from EDS in the name of Lana Lewallen dated 10 May 1985. It is addressed to staff coming to Britain from the United States to work on electronic data systems. I have given copies of it to the Treasury and in a letter to Ministers at the Home Office. It states:

"For TDYs, the answers to these questions are crucial because you can be denied entry into the country with the wrong answers. Since you are on temporary assignment here, you are only CONSULTING during your stay here. According to British Immigration Authorities, that is not 'business'. Therefore, do not reply 'business' or 'work' because you are NOT, according to their definition. An acceptable answer to the first question is 'pleasure'. It is acceptable, if you wish, to add that you may consult a bit for the London branch of your American employer. You may mention EDS, but do not mention BUPA. The best advice however is not to offer any information other than what you are specifically asked.

If you have family who are coming over with you or who will join you later, they should NEVER say they are coming to visit or stay with their spouse/parent who is working in London.

In answering the question 'how long will you be in the UK?', remember that you will probably leave the UK several times for trips abroad during your stay. Therefore, do NOT answer six months or four months because that is incorrect. Rather, you can state 'about four weeks at present' because that will be more factual.

When you do leave and re-enter the UK, please follow these same instructions. It is important that you know and adhere to these instructions upon entry. It is your responsibility to get yourself into the country; EDS cannot exempt anyone from passport control."

The memorandum states:

"You will also be queried as to 'the nature of your visit to the United Kingdom: business or pleasure?' and 'how long do you plan to be in the UK?'"

That raises questions about the possible deception of immigration authorities. My understanding is that the Home Office is looking into this whole matter. Does the Ministry of Defence want to award contracts, which may have a greater value than those for AWACs, to a company which behaves in that way towards British immigration control, rather than to Plessey, Racal or some other British company? As I say in my letter to the Minister of State, Treasury, who is co-ordinating the committee:

"What concerns me infinitely more is whether EDS, operating in such a way, is the type of company who should be given preference by the British taxpayer over Racal, Plessey or British Telecom. Not only do vast sums of money appear to be at stake, but a lot of high-tech research is clearly involved. If EDS were to get the contract, would that R and D at advanced level be done in the UK? I think the answer is no."

On 7 January David Rose wrote in *The Guardian*:

"The first check to EDS's plans for government contracts came in December, when the £10 million Passport Office computer was awarded to a British rival.

This followed the Guardian's disclosure that the firm had urged American staff to lie to immigration officials in order to work in Britain illegally, the admission by Mr. Ross Perot, the former EDS chairman, that he paid £2 million into a Swiss bank account as ransom for American hostages in the Middle East: he had been asked to do so by the disgraced Lt-Col Oliver North, the central figure in the Irangate scandal.

The loss of the contract came as a shock to EDS staff."

What is the position of the Ministry of Defence in relation to EDS?

I interrupted the Minister's opening speech to ask about the talks in Washington about the Falklands. It may be primarily a Foreign Office responsibility, but it is not sufficient for a Defence Minister simply to say that that does not concern the British Ministry of Defence. Certainly it does. Therefore, I look forward to some reconsideration of that in the Minister's reply.

Following my surgery on Saturday I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence. Two constituents came to see me and were absolutely furious about what had happened to the Queen's Own Highlanders in Kenya, with which a relative of theirs is serving. I have put the matter in writing to the Secretary of State, but I might not have raised the matter had it not been for today's news. The high commission in Kenya has said that it greatly regrets that any instructions were given to service men not to go to Mombasa and the coast. Apparently the doctor attached to the forces is saying that he hopes that no more British service men will take leave on the coast. Which is right—the high commission or the forces?

The second part of the question arises from what my constituents told me. They said that their relative had told them—I do not know the accuracy of this—that the warning about AIDS on the coast had been given in a frivolous, ribald manner. I remember easily what happened in my national service days. The inimitable regimental sergeant-major, the late Frank Dodd, of the Royal Scots Greys used to say, "Be careful, lads. Remember your French letters when you leave the guardroom. Ho! ho!" That is how it was put. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who has great Army experience, knows exactly what I am talking about. Precisely what instructions were given and what warning was brought home to those men before they went on leave on the Kenyan coast? What is the Government's position as between our own high commission and the advice that is attributed to the Army doctor?

I should like now to discuss Army responsibilities and military intelligence as this is one of the few opportunities that hon. Members get to address such matters. I had the first question to the Prime Minister today and asked her whether she would place in the Library a copy of all correspondence conducted on her behalf between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Chapman Pincher. The right hon. Lady replied:

"It remains inappropriate to comment on matters in issue in the Peter Wright case in Australia. I also intend to follow the precedent set by previous Governments of not commenting on security matters."

This is not the occasion to go into the merits of the Australian court case, and I shall not do so. However, I refer to the leader in *The Scotsman* on 16 December 1986, which stated:

"Tam Dalyell has a fair point when he asks, 'Is there any effective ministerial control over breaking into houses? Which Minister is responsible for any rules on breaking in?'".

I am referring to ministerial authorisation because, quite frankly, Mr. Chapman Pincher has told me on the telephone—I know him of old and believe him on this—that he did not collude in giving "Their Trade Is Treachery" in December 1980 to the Government agency involved. Therefore, it was either done from inside Sidgwick and Jackson or it was done by theft and housebreaking. Following my question to the Prime Minister, I should like to ask whether theft or housebreaking was involved and whether there was ministerial authorisation for burglary. We are concerned about ministerial control over state burglary.

I should like to know also how it came about that MI5 was apparently talking to Sir Robert Armstrong without the Attorney-General being consulted. An Army debate is the only time that one can raise such issues. Some of us might say that if the Attorney-General was not consulted that was because the Government did not want the Attorney-General to be in the position of having to ask awkward questions.

Precisely what is the ministerial control over military intelligence? What can Peter Wright have meant by saying that he took part in operations that were "deniable, authorised and illegal"?

That brings me to the activites of the Wilson years. You and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and several other hon. Members lived through those years and we can be forgiven for being extremely curious about what happened, because many strange things happened then.

The first time that I became interested in such matters was almost 20 years ago, when my friend—the friend of many hon. Members—the then Member of Parliament for Ealing, Acton, Mr. Bernard Floud, tragically took his own life. We wondered at the time what exactly had happened because it was public knowledge that the then Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, had understandably offered Bernard Floud junior ministerial office. That offer was withdrawn when an MI5 report—this was public knowledge at the time—suggested to the Prime Minister and to the Cabinet office that Bernard Floud was not a proper person to hold ministerial office. Some hon. Members will recollect that Bernard Floud took his own life in a gas-filled room.

I have talked about that to my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and we should like to ask the Government, since we now know that Bernard Floud's MI5 monitoring officer went by the name of Peter Wright, whether there is not a case, even 20 years later, for Ministers calling for the Government agency security file on the Bernard Floud case, and making some sort of assessment. I am not asking to be shown that file but could not my right hon. Friend, a former Home Secretary, and a Privy Councillor, be shown it? If he says that everything is all right, that would satisfy me. Alternatively, the Government might think that it was the kind of thing that could be shown to the Leader of the Opposition.

Bernard Floud was a friend of some of us, and in the light of what we now know about Peter Wright being his monitoring officer and about what Peter Wright has said in the Australian court about burgling his way through London, we should like to know the agony that our friend the then Member of Parliament for Ealing, Acton was put through.

I refer to *The Times* of 10 December 1986, which asks, "What is a deniable operation?" Mr. Wright is quoted as saying:

"I have taken part in tens, possibly hundreds, of illegal operations, for which I might have been sent to prison, if detected."

Were those operations secretly authorised on the condition that they could be publicly disowned? Some of us would like to know the answer to that question. It could be said that that is raking up the past for the sake of raking up the past, but I reply to that in terms of the judgment in an Australian court six years ago of Mr. Justice Mason, who said:

"It is unacceptable that in our democratic society there should be a restraint on the publication of the information relating to a Government where the only vice of that information is that it enables the public to discuss, review, and criticise government action."

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

In justifying myself for going back two decades, I refer to the noble Lord Dacre of Glanton, Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, who, although a political opponent, did me the courtesy of writing a foreword to a book that I wrote. We are personal friends. He said that a country,

"as the price of protecting its present, it should yield up the records of its past."

Those are not the words of a Labour politician. They are the words not so much of the Conservative party as of the intellectual Right wing of British society.

Finally, I should like to give a short explanation. It is true that after much thought and discussion with colleagues, and with the agreement of the Leader of the Opposition, I have referred the case of the forged bank account of Lord Glenamara to the Security Commission. I thought that that was the proper way to do it and, quite frankly, that that would be more likely to get a serious reply than if I had sent it to Ministers.

The background is that Lord Glenamara — your friend and mine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when he was known as Mr. Ted Short, our Chief Whip—asked me to look into the whole background of how he got into difficulties with a Swiss bank account which turned out to be forged.

I am asking present Ministers — regardless of how Lord Griffiths, Lord Justice Lloyd, Philip Allen, Sir Alan Cockerell, Sir Hugh Beech, Sir Alisdair Steedman and Sir Michael Palliser decided to act — to take some responsibility in looking up the files of those days and asking direct questions of the security services. I do not know whether the Security Commission, converting itself as it is entitled to do after asking Parliament's permission into a tribunal, is the best way to go about it. However, I am jolly sure that some of us are not going to let the Ted Short affair rest until such time as we have had an explanation. I use this Army debate with its connections with military intelligence to say that explanations are due from two decades and less ago.

8.9 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): It was a great pleasure and extremely interesting to listen to the speech of the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett). It takes a lot of courage to make such a speech from the Labour Benches and I believe that what he said reflects much more accurately than his Front Bench colleagues the real grass-roots feeling of the Labour voter throughout the country. If I have my geography right, I believe that his constituency is included in the old recruiting area of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

My hon. Friend the Minister who is to wind up the debate is a Coldstreamer and I believe that Grenadiers and even Life Guards argue about which is the oldest regiment of the British Army. However, I believe that the Northumberland Fusiliers have the oldest battle honour in the British Army and contributed more battalions in the first world war than any other regiment. I wish that that same fighting spirit would grasp the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen.

I listened horrified to the opening speech of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). It seemed that 1,000 years of our history and the painful lessons that we should have learnt about military preparedness have been completely, almost wilfully, forgotten. If there is one overriding lesson that those 1,000 years have taught us it is that we must be prepared and we must show our potential enemies that we are prepared. We are attacked whenever we show that we are weak or when we show a lack of determination to defend not only our country but our areas of vital interest. The Romans had a classic saying that if one wants peace one should prepare for war.

We have learned that, expensive as it is to prevent war by means of deterrence, the fact is that to fight a war is infinitely more expensive in terms of money and blood. Therefore, we must have that deterrence. We must be prepared to spend money on deterrence or on that insurance. It is the duty of Governments of any political persuasion in Britain to ensure that our nation is prepared and to ensure that we demonstrate a positive attitude towards defence, encourage our electorate to spend the necessary money on defence and ensure that the military force in this country is not only skilled but is equipped with modern and integrated weapon systems.

I believe that showing an attitude of determination to our defence is necessary for the home base, our NATO role and out of area. Switzerland is a classic example of a country that shows an active and positive determination to defend itself. It uses reserve forces and ensures that the military force is integrated with civil defence. I believe that we still have a lot to learn in that respect. I know that the Government have done much in that area in the past seven and a half years, but there is still more to be done.

Britain's contribution to NATO in terms of manpower and hardware and our attitude to NATO are crucial to morale within NATO. It certainly is when it comes to the support of the United States for NATO. As the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) said, quite correctly, the American people are getting a little impatient about the attitude of Europe towards its own defence. I believe that the Anglo-American relationship is probably the greatest force for peace in the world and is a key aspect underlying NATO. Therefore, our attitude towards NATO is critical to morale and effectiveness. The relationships within NATO are built upon mutual respect and required mutual effort.

I shall now deal with the out-of-area determination. I was pleased to hear of the exercise in Oman. Since 1980 I have said that we should look at the areas of vital interest to NATO and we should show a willingness and ability to look out of area and react. I believe that in the Falklands some of the advice given to Galtieri by his Foreign Minister, Costa Mendez, was based on the fact that Britain was locked into its NATO role, was over-stretched and would not have the physical ability to re-take the Falklands and that it had a lack of determination. Britain had retreated from east of Suez and the Mediterranean and it was felt that it would not be able to gird itself to play any defensive role in the Falklands. I believe that our willingness to liberate the Falklands was important on a global scale in showing an attitude towards out-of-area threat and our preparedness to deal with it.

Obviously, we do not just want peace at any price. We want peace with freedom. That costs big money. I know that the year ahead will bring some tough spending decisions and I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ministry of Defence good luck in their future battles on that front because there will be some tough decisions and I shall fully support what I would consider adequate spending on defence as I think that it is a vital insurance policy for our nation.

I now wish to deal with the skill of the military force and equipping it with modern integrated weapons systems. I believe that if we are to be able to afford and continue possessing updated and therefore modern and effective weapons systems, we have to make more efficient use of manpower. Obviously, I entirely support the philosophy of having a small, elite, highly trained professional basic army, but we must not misuse it. I believe that there is a danger that overstretch is starting to eat into recruitment and cause early retirement in the professional armed forces. That overstretch is very dangerous because we are losing top quality people at non-commissioned officer and officer level. It is something that the Government must look at as a matter of great concern.

The hon. Member for Woolwich mentioned the interesting change in demography and the future recruiting for the Armed Forces, not only in the professional Armed Forces, especially the Army, but for the reserves and the Territorial Army. I believe that the efficient use of manpower within the professional Army must increasingly lead us towards a greater integration with an enhanced Territorial Army. I know that the Government have done much to enhance the Territorial Army, not only in its numbers but in its quality, equipment and general efficiency. Serving in the Territorial Army I see that, and it is extremely gratifying. However, more has yet to be done as it has to be done within the reserves, the Home Service Force and civil defence. The Government are moving in the right direction and have done a lot, despite resistance from certain parts of the House. However, much more needs to be done in that area.

I should like to mention the academic training of officers at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. I understand that the academic content of the course has been diluted until it is almost non-existent. One can ask particularly where money is important, why one should bother to give academic instruction when many potential officers will have been to university in the first place. But one must consider that some of those officers will not have gone to university. It is important, even if the officers are streamed at Sandhurst, that more emphasis is given to academic instruction.

The nuclear weapon has been invented; we cannot disinvent it. It exists. The argument about nuclear-free zones was dispelled by the situation in Japan in 1945 and by the recent disaster at Chernobyl, which showed that there are no such things as effective nuclear-free zones. As an existing weapon system, as long as they are efficient in their military use, nuclear weapons form part of an integrated, modern defence system. It is an absolute outrage to try to tell the British people that a non-nuclear defence policy for our nation is credible. The Socialist party's non-nuclear defence policy is hypocritical, impractical and misleading. Further, it is treacherous, and I believe that it knows that.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), was a very good Secretary of State for Defence, when one looks back at those years a few decades ago. He knows, despite the policy of the present Labour party, what the real defence issues are. It was interesting, at the time of the Socialist party conference in September 1986, to see him under the glare of the television lights. We saw him desperately searching for a peg upon which to hang both faces at one time—the face of non-nuclear defence, and the face for which he knows perfectly well that, when it comes to the reality of government in this country, there is no alternative.

The nuclear weapons system is part of an integrated weapons system for this country, and is the essence of our defence policy and the essence of rendering it credible on a strategic scale. The non-nuclear defence policy proposed by the Socialist party is extremely dangerous. It is hypocritical and misleading to the British public. It is treacherous to say that it is credible and that we shall still have a defence system if we put the money—even if that were to be true — into another area, such as conventional defence. In expressing my support for the Government, may I say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have done an excellent job. As I see it, from a worm's eye view in the Territorial Army, we must try to make the armed forces increasingly efficient, keep modern integrated weapons systems at their disposal, change the emphasis of manpower and use the reserves. The Government have shown great skill and a great feeling for defence, plus a feeling for prudent spending. The Government have struck a great balance and I praise my hon. Friend and his fellow Ministers for what they have done and offer them my strong support in fighting for prudent defence budgets in the future.

8.24 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I am very sad to have to follow that contribution from the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). I do not think that I have ever heard a more arrogant and condescending speech since I have been in the House. The way that he patted my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garret) on the head for believing—as many Labour Members do—that there might be some use for the Territorial Army was extremely condescending. To say that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend had courage to speak out like that because he was speaking for the Labour Benches was an insult to those of us who have served in the armed forces, not the Territorial Army.

Mr. John Browne: I served for 10 years.

Mr. Rogers: It was an insult to many of the working class, especially those in my constituency, who gave their lives in defence of this country. Unlike many from the hon. Member's class, they did not go into the secret service and act as spies for the Russians. The hon. Gentleman insults Labour Members by making such a speech.

Mr. Browne: Nonsense.

Mr. Rogers: I shall put my anger aside and get on with my contribution, and put the arrogance of the hon. Member for Winchester down to where he comes from. It shows how the Conservative party attempts to twist the position of Labour Members. We hope that over the coming months we shall be able properly to present our defence policy. In order to do so, we need some answers from Ministers.

In his opening statement today, and in last year's debate on the Army, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) commented on the balance of spending within the armed forces and within the Army itself. He has posed many questions of detail, as well as the major issue of total funding with and without Trident spending. The Government have still not answered those

[Mr. Rogers]

crucial questions. The question that faces us in consideration of our defence budget is how we can maintain and develop our conventional forces and carry the enormous burden of funding a nuclear potential such as Trident. How far are we prepared to put our armed services into indefensible conventional positions so that we can fund weapons that will, supposedly, be their saviour against alleged overwhelming conventional Soviet forces? That is the crux of the matter when determining our defence priorities.

The Government have chosen what we on the Opposition Benches consider to be an untenable policy. We are committed to developing our conventional forces to a point where they will not need to be bailed out by nuclear weapons — nuclear weapons that will almost certainly destroy the defenders as well as the aggressors.

Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli was challenged on the SP70. As a battlefield weapon it will be relatively useless, because it has a range of something like 19 km. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, it will create havoc on both sides, besides the ultimate problem that will arise for the civilian population.

The hon. Member for Winchester is smiling. He may find that humorous, but we do not. Because we are denying our forces the conventional weapons to enable them to fight in the first-strike conventional Russian attack, we shall be placing them in jeopardy. There is no recovery from that position. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli said, when we start playing that game the stakes must then proceed to the ultimate.

We must prove the validity of our position to the British electorate over the next few months. In order to do that, we must look at the balance of conventional forces to see whether they can be funded and sustained, and what more is required to effect a balance. Therefore, we must look at the relative strengths of NATO and the Warsaw pact countries as they face the potential battlefield of Europe.

It is commonly assumed—indeed it is often asserted, as we have heard today—that the Warsaw pact has an overwhelming superiority in conventional forces in Europe. That assumption and those assertions are usually supported by unqualified numerical comparisons, such as the numbers of tanks or artillery pieces on both sides. However, if we look at the quantitative potential of both sides, a different picture will emerge of actual military capability. The evidence suggests that the assumption of a vast Warsaw pact conventional force superiority is superficial and misleading.

Every year, in the Statement on the Defence Estimates, the Government publish an assessment of the balance of conventional forces. That is known as a "bean count" approach because it is a straightforward counting of the forces and comparison with opposing systems.

However, as I have said, if one looks at the potential qualitatively, the straight number counts do not necessarily translate into an immediate picture of likely military effectiveness of the armed forces. While such comparisons are obviously useful for a quick examination of a problem, it can be argued that on issues as important as the defence of the West, more complex examinations are valid. The Government recognise that. We see on pages 58 and 59 of annex A of this year's Defence Estimates that they attempted to calculate the conventional balance. But, at the end, their view was that that was not possible; it was too complicated.

However, the Americans have had such a system since 1971. The United States defence department uses a more detailed assessment which overcomes many of the problems of a straight-count approach. The system of armoured division equivalents weighs the mobility, survivability and firepower of every weapon in every division on the central front. Although the exact numbers of ADEs on each side are classified, the ratio is not. To support our argument the figure that should be considered, rather than straight count of men, tanks or artillery pieces, is the ratio between the two forces after a qualitative assessment, and, of course, the difference is not very much.

Such an assessment leads us to the conclusion that the Warsaw pact forces cannot achieve immediate superiority in any conventional attack upon the West. Therefore, we argue that a more detailed and comprehensive assessment of the Soviet conventional threat to Western Europe would show that the balance of forces is nothing like as adverse for NATO as has been traditionally represented. From that, it is clear that the West is in a far better position to respond positively to nuclear arms control initiatives which would not mean a renunciation of security, as alleged by Conservative Members.

Labour Members maintain that the Government's defence position is untenable and misleading. The Government's assumption of the Soviet Union's advantage in the conventional force level, which constitutes a threat which is economically impossible for us to match, obviously leads them to a reliance on nuclear forces for the defence of the West. That assumption is not only open to criticism; it is wrong.

The Government's position is contradictory. On the one hand, they clamour for nuclear weapons on the basis that they are needed to counterbalance what they assert are overwhelming Soviet conventional forces. On the other hand, the Government's policy of spending more money on nuclear weaponry prevents any possibility of correcting that asserted imbalance. The Government are falling between two stools and are in danger of failing to maintain a strategic or even operational effectiveness in either area.

The Labour party's position is simple and straightforward. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli said in last year's debate, by cancelling Trident we can maintain present levels of conventional defence spending. By doing that, we can fulfil our commitments to our allies and to NATO. But above all, we can fulfil our commitments to our own service men and women in the armed forces.

8.35 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I apologise for missing the opening speeches from the Front Benches, but my train from Newcastle was five and a half hours late.

Mr. Frank Cook: Were not they running yesterday?

Mr. Trotter: I had constituency engagements yesterday.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) referred to his meeting recently with General Bernie Rogers, supreme allied commander Europe. What a pity he did not tell us General Rogers's views on the one-sided

nuclear disarmament proposals of the Labour party. I find it hard to believe that that subject did not come up in that discussion.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the conventional odds against the Army in Germany being 4½:1 against an acceptable 3:1. If one works out the arithmetic, that would seem to show he is suggesting a need for a 50 per cent. increase in the Army capability in Germany. Apart from the enormous cost that that would involve, it would certainly require conscription. And, however strong the conventional forces in Germany may be, they are powerless if against them is ranged an opponent who has nuclear weapons when we have not.

I want to comment on the organisation of the Army at home and overseas. I shall talk mostly about our commitment to NATO, because in recent times most of the Army is so committed. There remains a worldwide involvenient which has been referred to by other hon. Members. The recent exercise of 5 Airborne Brigade in Oman was a great success and an example of how we can respond to a crisis that might emerge thousands of miles away.

My comment tonight on out-of-theatre forces would best be concentrated on the Falkland Islands as I was fortunate enough to be one of those hon. Members who visited the garrison there a few months ago. All the members of that party were most impressed by the long hours put in by the soldiers there. The schedule of work was six days a week, 12 hours a day—72 hours a week —a working week that reminded me of that in a Korean shipyard. Despite those long hours, morale was high. It would be wrong not to tell the House that everybody was looking forward to the time when their four months tour came to an end, but in the meantime they got on with a worthwhile job, working long hours effectively and with a high morale.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that nuclear weapons would not have been any use in a place such as the Falklands, and, had the Argentines waited for the Government to dispose of the carriers, they would not have been able to get the Army there in the first place because 8,000 miles is a long way to swim even for a highly trained soldier?

Mr. Trotter: There was never any question of getting rid of the carriers. No such suggestion was ever put before the House, so the hon. Gentleman's point does not arise. However, if the Argentines had developed a nuclear weapon, that could conceivably have affected the position. Certainly in the campaign that was fought, nuclear weapons played no part.

We should consider the time being spent in the Falklands by some personnel in specialist units. They are in danger of being sent there too often. That applies in particular to those involved in the port units, where the problem is that the only other port of any size that the Army mans is in Southampton water, so the men are rotated to the south much more frequently than other soldiers are. The matter should be examined.

When the new barracks are fully occupied, as they will be shortly, we shall also have to examine how best the soldiers can remain in contact with the civilian population. We were impressed on our visit by the excellent relationship between the Falkland islanders and the garrison. I am sure that hon. Members do not wish the withdrawal of the men from their present involvement in the settlements and in Port Stanley to lead to a lack of contact. I am sure that attention will be given to this matter.

I wish next to refer to the northern flank of NATO. Of course, the main part of the Army is committed to the central front in Germany but we have an important role in the north. Although the role of the Marine Brigade in Norway is well known, we are also committed to send a brigade to Denmark in an emergency. If one includes the logistic support unit, it is the largest brigade in the Army. It has 10,000 regulars and 5,000 territorials, a total of 15,000 men. Indeed, it is almost a misnaming of the force to call it a brigade. By most standards, it is of divisional strength. It includes not just infantry, armour with Chieftain tanks, gunners and engineers, as one might expect, but ports units, workshops and hospitals. It is very much a self-contained force. It is very important to the defence of the Baltic approaches. It is the major reinforcement available to the area within a few days in the event of an emergency. I am sure that in this commitment we are making a very important contribution to NATO. The Baltic approaches are a vital area that we must not overlook.

We cannot consider the organisation of the Army in Germany without referring to the role of the TA. On mobilisation, apart from their contribution to the front line, the TA provides many of the vital logistics units in the Rhine Army. The change in the disposition of I Corps, as a result of the efforts of General Sir Nigel Bagnall, when, first, he was the corps commander and then the commander of the Rhine Army, has led to a great improvement in the way in which we utilise our forces in Germany. One of our divisions is now in reserve and another division comes out from the United Kingdom to protect the rear areas. The present commander in Germany, Sir Martin Farndale, has gone on record as saying:

> "Our plan to defend our rear areas is far better than that of other allies. We are obtaining a maximum use of resources."

All credit is due to the senior officers in Germany, who have thought out and implemented this important reorganisation which has led to a far better defence than before and a far better use of the men, money and materials available.

Hon. Members will know that we have recently experimented with 6 Brigade in the air mobile role. It has been a successful experiment and much has been learnt. With the welcome decision to increase the armoured strength in Germany, with the creation of an additional tank regiment, 6 Brigade will return to its armoured role. It will thus no longer be available as an air mobile brigade. I am sure that the House will understand the advantage of the air mobile brigade. It is light, quick to move, not restricted to roads, and able to act as a plug should there be any breakthrough in the front line. It is a most important role and one that we should continue permanently.

We must consider how we can best find the men to replace the present brigade in this role. Obviously, it will need to be a United Kingdom-based brigade because we face a personnel ceiling in Germany. There is no way in which we can get any further men for this purpose out of the present strength of the Rhine Army. However, it does not need to be a large formation. It is necessarily a slimline

[Mr. Trotter]

force. It could not move itself quickly by helicopter if it had a vast tail. We are talking about perhaps 3,000 men —rather than the 15,000 to which I referred in the case of 1 Brigade committed to the defence of Denmark. I think that it should be possible for us to obtain, out of the Army's strength in this country the men necessary to form this new brigade when 6 Brigade returns to the armoured role in a couple of years.

We are seeing a complete change in thinking about the use of helicopters on the battlefield. They are increasingly being seen as fighting vehicles. It is interesting that the commander of an attack helicopter is not the pilot, any more than a tank driver is the commander.

If we want to retain a helicopter construction industry in this country, as we should, we must place regular military orders for helicopters. We cannot expect Westland to stay in business if we place orders on an intermittent basis. There must be a regular ordering programme, and we must face that fact.

I know the arguments against making decisions at this time. For one thing, it is hard to decide the size of the new troop helicopter helicopter. Personally I believe that it should not be too large. Obviously, there are advantages in carrying a large number of men at one time, but if we lose a large helicopter, we are in danger of losing a large part of an infantry battalion with it. The Special Air Service was involved in a tragic crash in the Falklands. A large part of the force was lost in one helicopter. I favour a 15-man or 16-man lift rather than a lift involving 30 men or more.

Army logistics is an enormous task in peace time, and, of course, it is even greater in war time. The Army possesses huge depots. That at Donnington contains the largest and most modern warehouse in the country. It is fully automated. The supply line goes from the depots in this country to Germany. An excellent job is done by thousands of men, many of them civilians, in this logistics system. Perhaps they do not receive enough public praise because they are not so much in the public eye, but without them the front-line units could not function. They are absolutely vital. The end of the logistics line is at the front line, to which vast quantities of ammunition, fuel, food and spares must be provided. We should pay tribute to the men involved in that side of the Army, as well as their colleagues involved in the front line infantry armour and artillery.

The Army is well equipped and in very good heart. There is, however, one piece of equipment to which I must refer. A decision must now be taken about the replacement of the Abbott self-propelled gun. It is old, too small, its shell is not powerful enough and, above all, its range is too limited. It cannot read the targets. In particular, it cannot hold off at arm's length the artillery that would be firing at it. Our gunners are the best in the world, but we are not giving them sufficiently modern equipment. The proposed replacement, the SP70, the NATO gun, has been talked about since the 1970s, hence its name. It will be the SP90 by the time it gets into service, if ever. It will certainly not be in service in the time scale that we need for our four regiments that still have Abbott. It is not a matter of money; it is a matter of having tried to make work a co-operative project within NATO. That is of course a very commendable aim.

The time has come when we should go our own way with the replacement. Vickers at Barrow has developed a gun to fulfil this role. We should now look down that line and not hold back any longer on the SP70.

I have talked about the equipment and the organisation of the Army. Above all, however, it is the personnel that give the Army its strength. If one meets the Army, whether it be in the Falklands, the United Kingdom or Germany, one cannot fail to be impressed by the young men, and indeed young women, in the units. They are well trained, well motivated, well led and well equipped. We can be proud of them. They do a great service for the country, and so do their families who so often have to live without them when they are away on detachment and exercises.

8.48 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I must register vested interests — a small one in that I served as a regular in the British Army, and was proud to do so, and a larger one in that the youngest of my brood, my son, is serving in the British Army in West Germany, not a million miles from Hanover. Of course, I cannot tell the House where he is serving because the Soviets may be listening. I am even prouder of his service because it is of more value than mine was. The Opposition are all proud of the role performed by the British service man and service woman. We have always been proud of their role because, God knows, the working classes have always supplied the majority of those who have filled that role. I offer that point as a type of defence for my comments.

Sadly, the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has left the Chamber, but I shall comment on his speech so that he may read my points tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman was quick to comment on the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), but he promptly forgot the contents of my hon. Friend's speech. He disregarded my hon. Friend's exhortation not to engage in debate by rubbishing arguments. My hon. Friend appealed for logic, but the hon. Member for Winchester quickly forgot that appeal when he launched into an attack by rubbishing—not my choice of word—the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). Logic was certainly missing from his criticism and his following arguments.

The hon. Member for Winchester appealed to us to respond by organising the Army in a manner similar to the Swiss. That may well be good advice, but the hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that the Swiss have no surface vessels and submarines and do not have the gamut of international responsibilities that we have. The hon. Gentleman tried to criticise by innuendo nuclear-free zones. He said that Chernobyl had proved that no such thing as a nuclear-free zone could exist. We agree, but the concept of nuclear-free zones refers to the perpetrator, not the recipient. We believe that the ideal nuclear-free zone is a nuclear-free world. Sadly, the hon. Member for Winchester has admitted his reluctance to work towards that goal.

The hon. Member for Winchester said that we needed a professional force equipped with modern integrated weapons so that we were prepared. I welcome that statement because, by making that admission, the hon. Gentleman has put himself shoulder to shoulder with the Opposition. That is exactly what we seek. How prepared are we? In late October and early November 1984, I was able to visit the NATO headquarters, the Supreme

Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and West Germany. I saw that the provision for the Army's role for defence and counter-attack was appallingly inadequate. That was the fault not of the Army but of this Government, and perhaps partly of previous Governments. This Government had let the Army down. They had not let the generals down, because they were being well catered for in terms of salary and remuneration. The Government had simply let the forces down generally.

The Tommy Atkins of our armed forces were ill-equipped. I witnessed service men of many years experience tending vehicles that were measurably older than they were. The vehicles were treacherously out of date. The men were looking after the vehicles in an examplary fashion with the most meagre resources. I saw armoured vehicles with wonderful armour and magnificent armaments—weapons that could shoot a pea off a drum at about 6,000 m, but armoured vehicles that were immobilised by inadequate, inefficient motive power units.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway), who is not here either — I wonder where Conservative Members go; perhaps this is another retreat like the one from Egypt about which we heard — referred to Warsaw pact tanks that outnumber ours by 2:1. If we have tanks with inefficient, ineffective motive power units which cannot start in weather like today's, surely this gives the Warsaw pact even greater superiority. Is this not more proof—if proof were needed—that we need increased spending on conventional weapons? I learnt that some of the motive power units, which must continue to function effectively if we are to avoid cannibalisation and so reduce the number of effective components, needed spare parts. That is simple logic. Some of those spare parts could be obtained only from sources in Warsaw pact countries. In making these comparisons between the Warsaw pact and NATO, the position can become more preposterous than is worthy of comment.

These circumstances were commonplace. I am forced to remind the Minister of State that he said that the service men serve us well, and so they do. But, if we allow such a situation to exist, how well do we serve them? Why is there such a shortage of resources? Is it simply because the grotesque level of spending on nuclear weapons precludes us from putting sufficient money into conventional weapons—expenditure that is principally a mechanism of direct drainage of British economic resources straight into the copious coffers of Uncle Sam's nuclear weapons mongers—or is it neglect?

The lack of provision of conventional resources must be made good. I doubt that we would have any argument about that; hence the Labour party's policy for the redirection of the defence budget allocation from Trident schedules and the like to a programme of procurement of weapons of the very latest design in conventional terms —in fact, exactly that for which the hon. Member for Winchester called. We need to give our service men and women the tools to do the job for which they are trained and for which they are prepared to give their lives.

Do not the battlefield buffoons in the Conservative trenches realise that by depriving our troops of the most modern conventional arms they are condemning them to an early death from nuclear weapons in the Soviet strikes that would have to be made in response to our introduction of their use?

Mr. Robert Atkins: What about chemical shells?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman mentions chemical shells. The hon. Member for Winchester said that we cannot disinvent nuclear weapons. Of course we cannot, any more than we can disinvent chemical shells, poison gas, bacteriological warfare or the venereal divisions used by the Germans on the eastern front during the last war. Does the fact that we cannot disinvent them mean that we have to use them, because that is the form of logic being applied in this debate?

Mr. Atkins: Despite suggestions from the Opposition, I am not necessarily arguing that we need offensive chemical weapons. My point is that one shell in four in the Warsaw pact countries is a chemical shell, and if we have no answer to that, the threat that the Warsaw pact forces could use them is a threat that we need to think about.

Mr. Cook: I take the hon. Gentleman's point in the spirit in which he makes it, but since we know so little about our own secret services and the tricks that they get up to in this country, I am not sure that I can put much credence in secret service information emanating from Eastern bloc countries.

While I was in Germany I discussed these issues with the most senior of our staff officers, with General Sir Martin Farndale and his senior staff. I also discussed them during my visit to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and NATO headquarters. I should like to tell the House about one reaction to much of the discussion that went on over a number of days, sometimes into the early hours of the morning. Other ranks and non-commissioned officers were half amused but half admiring of the fact that I wore a CND badge because I am a member of the CND. I wore it in the mess and wherever I met military personnel and it served as a useful vehicle to open the subject.

I was impressed by a very senior British officer with whom I discussed matters at great length. I found him standing contemplating himself, as I thought, in a mirror but then I realised that his eyes were fixed on a point beyond the image of his own reflection and that he was deep in thought. I left him like that for a while. He said, "Frank," and I said, "Yes, Sir?" He said, "Do you remember the discussions that we had on nuclear disarmament?" I said, "Of course, I remember them vividly." He said, "I have been thinking carefully about them and I must tell you that if I were in your position I would have to adopt the same stance, because your logic holds good. Sadly, because of my position here, I suppose I shall have to put the argument into the tray marked 'Too difficult'."

When one puts that conversation alongside the constant appeals that we had from service men and women of all ranks for increased expenditure on conventional weapons — because that is the only kind of resistance that they would be able to offer to any insurgence of Soviet troops across that border — one sees the kind of dilemma with which we are faced.

Deterrence was the order of the day, so we must deprive our units of adequate supplies of the latest kit. Deterrence against what? We are told that General Rogers has threatened to withdraw about 350,000 United States troops from Europe if the Labour party comes to power and implements its policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. That was barely reported in Britain until it was picked up almost accidentally on the American media.

[Mr. Cook]

Further, members of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee who discussed this with us when we visited America in September last year used similar suggestions. I will not say threats; I shall call them suggestions.

That idea has been seized upon by the Conservative party in its more hysterical moments. So anxious is that party to continue to pour taxpayers' money into the purse of the American armourers, that it dispatched, without entry documents, I might add, Norman the two-wheeler to reassure his Republican cronies across the water that the Conservatives would continue to buy American weapons.

It is said that the deterrent is necessary, but what does it deter? If the argument that it is necessary holds good, is it a deterrent against Soviet aggression or against American withdrawal? The British electorate is entitled to know the answer to that one. Is not this pretence of nuclear defence merely a means of justifying the continued funding of the American war machine suppliers?

I shall conclude as I began, with two points of emphasis. The first point is the registration of pride in our service people for the job that they perform so selflessly. My second point is an appeal that we in this House at long last latch on to more logic in considering the type of equipment with which we arm our troops, men and women, when we expect them to put their lives on the line on our behalf.

9.4 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) spoke of the need for logic. What was missing from his speech and that of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) was a little arithmetic. The Labour party wants to end Britain's independent nuclear deterrent and spend the money instead on more conventional weaponry and manpower. Our nuclear weapon, Trident, is to cost some 3 per cent.—that is, about one thirtieth part — of our national defence budget. Abolition of it could lead to an increase in conventional defence expenditure of only about one thirtieth. If Britain's forces comprise about one fifteenth of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation forces, we are then talking about one thirtieth of one fifteenth. So the abandonment of Britain's deterrent could increase conventional forces for the defence of the West by roughly one thirtieth of one fifteenth, which is one four hundred and fiftieth.

The Warsaw pact, including the Soviet Union, has broadly double the conventional forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It has about 400 submarines as against our 200, about 7,000 military aircraft against our 3,000, and about 200 army divisions against about 120 on the NATO side. How can it possibly help to protect us to increase conventional forces by one four hundred and fiftieth part and abandon the protection afforded by the nuclear deterrent? That policy of the Labour party means taking a terrible risk with our security. The public know it, and I believe that it is the main reason for the fall-off in Labour support in opinion polls in the past six months.

As for the policy of the Liberal party and the Social Democrats, if by some misfortune they were to hold the balance in a hung Parliament, no one would have the slightest idea what Britain's defence policy was going to be. Last September the Liberal party conference voted to end before very long Britain's independent deterrent. The Liberal leader in a recent debate in the House listed six alternative defence policies without saying which of the six he supported. The Social Democrats do not want Trident but want Polaris, which will, in a matter of years, become out of date and not credible. The so-called alliance is deeply split from top to bottom. Its members are at sixes and sevens and their fumbling attempts to paper over the cracks deceive no one. That is why they too have fallen away sharply in the opinion polls.

A defence policy has to work. It has to protect and to deter, and it must do so credibly. It is no use going through the motions with a defence policy that is not credible. It is only the Conservative party that has a clear, honest and strong defence policy, and only the Conservative party that can keep Britain safe and free.

I turn to another Conservative cause, the long-term retention of the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, which trains British Army bands, whose high standards of excellence are the envy of the world. I should first thank my right hon. and hon. Friends who are or have been Defence Ministers over the past four years for their endless patience in this matter, as this is the 14th time that I have raised the subject in the House, and the third time in an Army debate. I have had 12 meetings with Ministers, one with the Prime Minister last January, one with the Secretary of State for Defence in March, two with his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), one with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley), one four years ago with my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), three with my noble lord, Lord Trefgarne, one with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and two with my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman). The only Defence Minister who has dodged me so far is my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), who is sitting on the Front Bench and, I understand, is to reply to this debate.

Although I thank the Defence Ministers for their patience, I make no apology either to them or to the House that I have been almost constantly on about this. Kneller Hall is seldom out of my thoughts. If it has become close to an obsession, that reflects the fact that I care greatly about it. It is a cause that has caught my heart and my imagination. I am fortified by the knowledge that I am not alone, because 164 of my right hon. and hon. Friends signed early-day motion 397 in 1986; those 164 included 12 of the 17 officers and executive of the 1922 Committee. I shall not read the motion to the House again because it is long, but that tremendous support from my colleagues has been echoed by support from another place where Major-General Earl Cathcart led a debate last February. Apart from Lord Trefgarne, who wound up the debate, the five peers who spoke were unanimous in their support for maintaining the status quo.

That support is echoed by the public. A total of 18,579 people have signed petitions. Those people are largely my constituents from Whitton, Twickenham, Teddington and the Hamptons, but also include a considerable number of constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe). Many of us were delighted a fortnight ago when he received an honour. His constituency boundary comes close to Kneller Hall and he has been a tower of strength in the matter. Others who signed the petition were constituents of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr.

Ground)—whose constituency is about half a mile away —and of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). Both my hon. Friends have strongly supported Kneller Hall.

Kneller Hall has been the home of the Royal Military School of Music in Twickenham for 129 years. The Army bands trained there lift the spirit of the nation. They represent one of our finest traditions. They enhance morale in the Army. They promote recruitment and as part of the traditional British scene they help to attract to our shores visitors whose spending generates income and employment and yields a tax revenue. The high standard of British Army bands is linked inextricably to the standards of Kneller Hall, which is doing a marvellous job in training Army bands.

Some people in the Ministry of Defence have dreamt up a scheme of improvement to merge Kneller Hall with the training of bands in other services. As the late Dr. Samuel Johnson, who frequently visited my constituency, said when he went to see Garrick at Hampton:

"most schemes of political improvement are very laughable things."

I finally ask my right hon. and hon. Friends, the Ministers in the Ministry of Defence, to note the received American wisdom, "If it ain't bust, don't fix it."

9.13 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Pride in the Army has been expressed from both sides of the House, so we are not arguing about whether we are proud of those people on whom our safety depends. What we are arguing about is how they should be equipped and armed.

When opening the debate, the Minister said that his party felt that a combined conventional and nuclear response was required. Our contention is that, because the present forces on the European side are almost entirely dependent on nuclear weapons, the result will be to resort to those weapons within hours and days rather than weeks and months. That means that within a short time of a war starting, nuclear weapons will be used and escalation will be inevitable. There would then be no possibility of reaching a diplomatic solution.

I think we have all assumed too much that a war would be calculated as wars in the past have been. There is a great danger that a limited conflict may escalate into a major conflict. However, my argument applies in the other direction as well, because not all our allies in NATO have nuclear weapons. Norway and others will not have nuclear weapons on their soil. We must also remember that, since the 1950s, the British Army has been involved in limited actions in the Falklands, Cyprus, the Lebanon and Northern Ireland. The kind of training and equipment necessary for such conflicts and that required in any future actions will not rely on nuclear equipment.

In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who spoke about a visit to Germany, I recall seeing a battalion in Cyprus that had arrived there after peacekeeping duties in the Lebanon. I remember comments from that battalion about the aged equipment with which they were required to work in Lebanon. That made me believe that the Government were not backing the men in doing their duty because a professional army requires up-to-date and professional equipment.

I also claim that defence in this age depends not only on equipment but on an economically sound nation. I do not think that Ministers can slap their backs on that count. If we are to have an independent defence, there must be an independent and updated supply industry. As we have all seen, the problem is that more and more of our contracts are dependent on United States suppliers. We must be very careful. When a contract for equipment goes to the United States, it is accompanied by the technology upon which our defence industry depends for the future.

These are the matters that concern me greatly. Much has been said of the Falklands contest. That is the kind of action in which we are likely to become involved in the future. I remind the House that at the end of the Falklands conflict some of our batteries were down to six shells. If we hold up the Falklands conflict as a glowing example, we must remember what a near-run thing it was. The outcome was not achieved by foresight; it came about more by accident and the grace of God than by the will of the Prime Minister.

We entered into the Falklands conflict when we were negotiating the sale of aircraft carriers. After the first parliamentary delegation visited the Falklands, we were de-briefed by Admiral Woodward, who told us that he could not have mounted the operation if the carriers had been sold. We must also consider the fact that, once a conflict escalates to the use of nuclear weapons, the military and civilian casualties on both sides are incalculable. The effects of dropping nuclear shells cannot be restrained.

I remember watching an operation at the Commando training centre in Norway two years ago in which a medical team was trying to deal with a man encased in a protective radiation suit. It took a team of five almost 10 minutes to cut him out of the suit. I asked the team what casualties they would expect after the first nuclear engagement and was told that there would be thousands, if not tens of thousands. In such a situation, is it not reasonable that we should argue that our contribution to NATO should be as one of a group of equals with a common purpose other than as a member of a group dominated by one partner, America, as at present? As our contribution, we should aim to ensure that the nuclear response was not the first alternative and that the brake was put on through the use of an adequate conventional force. When nuclear weapons are used, there is no point of return. We must strive to protect Britain, but we must also aim at preserving peace.

9.20 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): This has been an interesting debate. Proper compliments have been paid by both sides of the House to our armed forces and, in an Army debate, compliments have been paid in particular to the Army. That is correct.

In congratulating the services, we should not overlook the fact that during the past few years there have been some incidents that do not reflect too well on the armed forces. There was a breakdown of discipline in Cyprus, which resulted in the Cyprus spy case and the Calcutt inquiry. There was also the incident in the 1st battalion of the 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles. It amounted almost to a mutiny and led to 110 men being dismissed. No proper explanation was given. Some of the Ministry of Defence statements and off-the-record briefings contained terrible racial overtones that were quite shocking. There was also the Royal Green Jackets incident which is now the subject of an inquiry. There have

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been allegations of initiation ceremonies and of serious bullying and malpractice. This should be a matter of concern to the House, because it devalues the reputation of the armed forces. The House should be given more information. The facts should not be hidden from hon. Members.

Before Christmas there was the banal announcement that the Household Cavalry was hunting deer in the New Forest. That did not go down very well with most people. Of all blood sports, hunting is the one that most people want abolished. To flout public opinion by allowing the Household Cavalry to take part in a most cruel and barbaric sport is unforgivable. The excuse was that the horses needed to be exercised. What would happen if a squaddie at the Army School of Driving at Leconfield said that he wanted to test the commanding officer's staff car by taking his girl to a disco? Would he be allowed to do so? Of course he would not. The same kind of abuse of public property took place before Christmas.

When the Prime Minister has the courage to go to the country and the Labour party forms the next Government, this practice will be stopped, and if any hunting takes place on Ministry of Defence property it will also be stopped——

Dr. Glyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No, I shall not. We shall stop any hunting on Ministry of Defence property until we have legislation on the statute book—*[Interruption.]* On all occasions when I have wound up defence debates I have allowed hon. Members to intervene and to take up time that ought to have been used by me. I have not sought to intervene in today's debate.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) said that my statements about the accident to the nuclear convoy were irresponsible. If there was a degree of irresponsibility, it was shared by a great many people in this country. They fear nuclear accidents. Nobody said that there would be a nuclear explosion. Nor did I. If, however, Professor Joseph Rotblat, a member of the team that originally designed the atom bomb, says that a fire and conventional explosion could have spread the plutonium used in nuclear weapons across the countryside, that is a source of consternation, fear and worry and it is proper for hon. Members to ask questions about it. On top of that there is a fire tender in the convoy to prevent just that type of accident. The hon. Member for Hampshire, East is the one who is irresponsible by not accepting——

Mr. Mates *rose——*

Mr. McNamara: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman made his speech and then he left the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman has come back and he will get the same treatment as I had during his speech, but I did not seek to interrupt him.

Mr. Mates *rose——*

Mr. McNamara: We are also aware that although the Ministry denied that there was any prospect of a nuclear leak——

Mr. Mates *rose——*

Mr. Robert Atkins: Give way. That was a personal attack on my hon. Friend.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Member for Hampshire, East made a personal attack on me.

Mr. Mates *rose——*

Mr. McNamara: America put scientists at a satellite receiving station on a red alert to make sure that there had been no nuclear leak.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East also said that we should not speak about such things because the Russians might not know about them, but the Russians have satellites and know all about the movement of those convoys.

The hon. Gentleman also said that I should not complain about convoys being moved about in the winter. I should like to know who planned that route. I thought that they were carefully planned, but the roads were not gritted properly and that allowed the accident to occur. I was not irresponsible. Anyone involved in such matters has the right to make such comments and ask such questions.

Mr. Mates *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McNamara: I will now turn to the question of irresponsibility. I want to know how it was that the Queen's Own Highlanders were allowed to go to Kenya without adequate precautions to see that the men——

Mr. Mates: What a ridiculous thing to say.

Mr. McNamara: I should have thought that the possibility of the spread of AIDS among the British Army would be of concern to a former regular officer. The hon. Gentleman should be concerned about the health and safety of our men.

One is entitled to ask why adequate precautions were not taken before the men went out to Kenya. It was only when the Parachute Regiment arrived there that a decision was taken to prevent the men from going on leave at shore stations at Mombasa and elsewhere. By then the incidence of AIDS and AIDS-related deaths in that country was known as well as the fact that 65 per cent. of prostitutes in Nairobi carry the AIDS virus. It is a serious matter that should concern the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) tabled a number of questions about that today and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security said, "I shall reply shortly." They were basic questions about who knew, when, why people were not told, and so on. All those questions could have been answered with simple straightforward replies—the facts were known.

The Under-Secretary had had a series of briefings—it is all in *The Guardian*—about what steps the Ministry was taking, what the Ministry had and had not thought about. We want to know who was responsible for not giving proper information to the regiment. Who was responsible for putting our troops in that risk when the facts were known?

Mr. Mates: What sort of risk?

Mr. McNamara: It is an important question for the Army and it is important to discover who was responsible.

I come to the Ministry's nasty habit of not answering questions in time or promising to answer after an awkward debate. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) spoke about the DROPS contract. I do not

wish to enter into any of the controversy surrounding the allocation of the contract. I am concerned about those matters that were raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the treatment of the managing director of that firm at the hands of the Ministry of Defence.

The Secretary of State and Lord Trefgarne said that no pressure had been brought upon the firm and that the letter from the managing director that was brandished on "Panorama" was unsolicited, despite the fact that that was denied by the managing director of the firm.

In answer to my question, the Minister who is to reply said:

"I cannot answer precisely for my noble Friend on all those questions, but I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman.—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 731.]

That was over a month ago. I waited anxiously for an answer and looked in every post. I had letters about the Royal Green Jackets and letters about this, that and the other, but nothing about that issue.

Consequently, last Thursday I tabled some questions to jog the Secretary of State's mind. I asked again whether Major-General Stopford telephoned Mr. Trafford Boughton on 30 June asking him to send a letter, whether Ministry officials were involved and whether any records were kept of telephone conversations or calls to defence contractors or potential contractors. All those questions should have been given a yes or no answer, but I was told only that the Minister would answer shortly.

Somebody is not telling the truth. The major-general, the managing director or Ministers are not telling the truth. However, Ministers are sending out letters saying that the letter on "Panorama" was completely unsolicited. The managing director, however, said that he was specifically asked and bullied for that letter.

The matter must be cleared up. It is easy for the Government to reply and it is disgraceful that hon. Members should table question after question without being given a reply.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East also mentioned the Gurkhas and the brigade's future. I share his concern, because in 10 years' time Hong Kong will be going. I was pleased to hear that the Select Committee would be looking into the matter of the future of the Gurkha regiments. However, our imperial history has left us with some problems. After all, we owe a debt to that kingdom for the part that it has played in helping us to defend our freedom. It is an impoverished country, which depends heavily on the help that it is given in overseas aid. Although I do not like the idea of mercenary soldiers being a form of overseas aid, I must say that the relationship between the two countries is long-standing and honourable.

The problems must be faced. There is some ambiguity about the Secretary of State's answers. We do not know precisely what the Ministry means when it says that in 10 years' time things will depend on the resources available. Does that mean that British battalions may be sacrificed to maintain the Gurkhas? Alternatively, does it perhaps mean that we should keep four or five battalions of Gurkhas? What role will they play? Are we talking about an extended role in Brunei or an extended role in the United Kingdom home base? Are we thinking, perhaps, in terms of our NATO commitment? I do not know the answer, but those points must be considered.

Mr. Mates: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No. With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I am applying the same principle. I am not being particularly nasty to him——

Mr. Mates: That is the second time that the hon. Gentleman has made a personal remark about me, and if he does not give way he will be doing me a grave discourtesy.

Mr. McNamara: Three points have been raised that deserve a proper reply from the Minister. One concerns the shortage of helicopters for the armed forces and for the Army in particular. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Northampton——

Mr. Mates: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. That is the second time that a personal remark has been made about an hon. Member by another hon. Member who has then declined to give way. There is only a convention——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me. I am afraid that that happens quite frequently. The hon. Gentleman will know that if the hon. Member who is speaking does not give way, he must resume his seat.

Mr. McNamara: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We would like a precise statement from the Minister on future requirements for support helicopters. We were promised that a decision would be made by autumn 1986 and that a statement would be made by the end of the year. We are now entering 1987 and we are still waiting. Shall we get it tonight and, if not, when?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) asked a question about the SP70. We are still awaiting a reply. Money is being spent on it. Is it true that we are afraid to withdraw because of any cancellation debts that might apply to us if we pulled out before the others? If that is so, the SP70 will go on costing money and not getting anywhere.

What are we doing about possible alternatives to the M109 and on the question of the AS90 with the Brazilians? The latter would seem to provide more jobs for us. Those are important matters for us.

The main burden of the debate, however, has been the question of the policies and strategies adopted by NATO. The Government have sought merely by reiteration of parrot phrases to maintain their case on that. It is a case which Labour Members, and especially my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), raised to examine the entire strategy of NATO. It is true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) said, that those doctrines are now more than 20, 30 or 40 years old. They need to be considered carefully and examined precisely. Therefore, it does no good merely to reiterate the conventional wisdom of the present time without examining whether the premises upon which those policies are based are now tenable in the light of the changes that have taken place in military strategy and weapons capability during the past 20 or 30 years.

Many Labour Members no longer believe that the Soviets have an overwhelming superiority in conventional forces which would enable them quickly to overcome western conventional forces. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda explained at some length the basis and reasons for considering those matters. The International Institute for Strategic Studies considered the conventional balance between the Warsaw pact and NATO. On page 225 of its strategic balance for this year it concluded:

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"Our conclusion remains that the conventional military balance is still such as to make general military aggression a highly risky undertaking for either side. Though possession of the initiative in war will always permit an aggressor to achieve a local advantage in numbers (sufficient perhaps to allow him to believe that he might achieve limited tactical success in some areas), there would still appear to be insufficient overall strength on either side to guarantee victory. The consequences for an attacker would still be quite unpredictable, and the risks, particularly of nuclear escalation, remain incalculable."

That is the point of the matter. Some hon. Members have spoken of the great deterrent value of the Trident system and nuclear weapons, but it was Sir John Nott, in a former incarnation as Secretary of State for Defence, who said:

"Having nuclear weapons means that we are not beholden to any tin pot dictator."

A few months later Galtieri landed in the Falklands and showed that nuclear weapons do not deter if we are not prepared to use them.

I wish to consider briefly a question that was raised. People have said that the Labour party has maintained that if we scrapped Trident the money saved could not do much for our conventional forces. The Minister said to me this morning that it would cost the Ministry of Defence £8·9 billion to maintain and provide equipment for an armoured division over 20 years. That is the figure given by the Ministry of Defence. Yet we are spending £9·9 billion on Trident over 20 years so that we would save £1 billion. That is without the running costs of £220 million a year which the Ministry has said it would cost to run Trident.

At present the Army has only 940 tanks in active service. Therefore, we could buy and operate 1,400 more. That would increase considerably the number of tanks available. Equally, we could use the money to buy 30 additional type 23 frigates and run them or we could use it for 10 new squadrons of Tornado GR1s and run them. That is clear from figures and statements from the Ministry of Defence.

The Government, whether they like it or not, must re-examine the whole basis of their defence policy. They do not have the money to maintain their present commitments. If they continue with Trident, the British Army of the Rhine will be run down in ammunition, training, weapon capability and many respects which the Minister was not prepared to mention as he tried to paint a glowing picture of these matters.

BAOR will be put at risk. If it is not capable of defending itself, it will weaken NATO and lower the nuclear threshold. Labour party policies are aimed so to strengthen our conventional forces, especially BAOR, that they will deter any would-be aggressor coming across the inner German border because they will be a strong, well-maintained and equipped, brave Army of which we all can be proud.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate the House on this wide-ranging debate, which has demonstrated the expertise and knowledge of the Army of many hon. Members. Several points have been raised which I shall try to answer in the short time available.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) were understandably concerned about the replacement for the Abbott gun and what was happening to SP70. In 1973 the Governments of Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom signed a memorandum of understanding to develop and produce collaboratively 155 mm self-propelled howitzers to meet their requirements as then foreseen. That followed the successful introduction into service of the collaborative FH70 towed howitzer.

The programme has encountered many problems in development and the House is well aware of them. That has resulted in slippages in the original time scale. At the same time, there have been changes to long-term operational requirements. To take account of the new operating characteristics of self-propelled artillery to be able to operate effectively against threat in the next century would need further extensive development and design modifications of the existing development prototypes. That would inevitably lead to further slippage of the programme.

In view of those uncertainties, the Defence Ministers of the three partners have met to discuss the way ahead of this important collaborative programme. It was acknowledged that because of the various difficulties encountered in the project to date it was no longer possible to develop and produce a collaborative howitzer in time to meet the earlier requirements of the nations. Accordingly, it was agreed that, to meet their most pressing requirements, nations should seek their own solutions on a national basis as judged necessary.

However, Ministers reiterated their support for the objective of achieving, if possible, a collaborative solution to meet their long-term requirements in this area. Therefore, they instructed their national armament directors to continue to explore the possibilities of continued collaboration for a longer-term procurement, taking into account the decisions that were taken meanwhile on national purchases so that Ministers could decide on the best way forward in due course.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I am afraid that I have a great deal to say.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli was most worried about our lack of orders for mines, and he mentioned anti-tank mines. The current in-service mine is known as Barmine and is to have its capability considerably enhanced to the whole width of a tank by the introduction of the FWAM fuses. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that the competition at sub-contract level for the production of the balance of our requirement for fuses to produce the full width attack anti-tank mine capability has just been concluded. The competition, which is worth about £28 million in all, has been won by Marconi Command and Control Systems at Hillend and the royal ordnance factory at Blackburn. Competition has yielded an estimated saving in excess of £3 million.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli and the hon. Member for Blaydon mentioned ammunition, particularly FH70 ammunition, where orders are allocated in accordance with the trilateral agreement which covers the programme.

However, the United Kingdom has a national order for the cartridge L6A1 which we expect to be placed in the

near future. That does not fall under the tripartite agreement. Current FH70 ammunition orders placed in Germany are proceeding satisfactorily and there is no question of any default on the part of German industry.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) referred to the important role of the Army's military correction training centre. I am very glad to acknowledge the valuable part that he has played in the work of that centre over the years.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) referred to the problems raised in the article in *The Independent* dealing with combat clothing. The article is inaccurate and misleading in several important aspects. That might have been avoided if the correspondent had taken advantage of the opportunity that was provided for a full briefing by the Army authorities concerned. The article referred to three items of combat clothing and I shall refer to just the first.

The introduction of flak jackets or combat body armour has not been "hit by spending restrictions." There is provision in the programme for the purchase of 138,000 items, starting in 1989, and that will be sufficient to equip all those who need special protection. However, before introducing what is an expensive item of kit, we need to be sure that it is right. That necessitates careful research on the design to ensure that it offers adequate protection and that it is not too heavy or uncomfortable for use in operational conditions. In other words, it must not impair operational performance.

The hon. Member for Woolwich also raised the question of the future location of the Army cataloguing authority. A review of defence codification is under way and the report of the study is now under consideration. The directorate of the defence codification authority is located in Glasgow—as the hon. Gentleman said—along with the naval codification staff. In the light of the study, I cannot give a categorical assurance about the location of the headquarters of the Army cataloguing authority until all our considerations are complete. I shall naturally keep the hon. Gentleman informed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) referred to the future of the Brigade of Gurkhas with the ending of the lease in Hong Kong. We have repeatedly made it clear that there will be a continuing role for the brigade in the British Army after 1997. Its final size and shape will turn on the operational and resource factors facing the entire British Army at the time, which it is too early, at this stage, to foresee. However, we welcome the fact that the Select Committee on Defence is looking into that.

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) paid tribute to the Territorial Army. However, he raised the point, as did my hon. Friend for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway), about unemployment benefit. Recent efforts have been aimed at resolving the anomaly whereby an unemployed TA member, as a result of receiving a relatively small amount of pay for attendance at a drill night, loses a great amount of benefit. Ministers and officials are examining that problem and it is hoped that an announcement will be made shortly. We already operate a scheme providing an enhanced disregard for TA members who are receiving supplementary benefit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glynn) referred to problems with the sewers at Victoria barracks. The work that is being done on the sewers has been undertaken by the Thames water authority and the local authority outside the site of the MOD development. It is not our responsibility and, indeed, we are watching its progress as closely as are the local residents. It may not be a matter that concerns the Opposition Front Bench, but I am sure that it concerns my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) mentioned the future of the UKMF. There are no current plans to withdraw or alter the nature of that force.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) mentioned, as he has done before, the issue of Kneller Hall. I am happy to be the last Defence Minister to give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he is seeking. A decision will be made soon on that and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will be in touch with him on that.

The hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) raised the question of the letter which was written about DROPS by Boughton. The difficulty was that if Boughton participated in the "Panorama" programme or otherwise influenced criticism about its elimination from DROPS, the only way in which we could respond in public to explain our position was to spell out its shortcomings in public.

We did not wish to do that if it could be avoided. It was for that reason alone that General Stopford was instructed to ascertain directly from Mr. Boughton his attitude and involvement in the television programme. My noble Friend the Minister of State was not involved because he had no need to be. Mr. Boughton volunteered the fact that he wished to have no part in it. It is noteworthy that he has not, as far as I am aware, complained directly to the MOD about it even when invited by my noble Friend in November to comment on any aspects. I am not aware of any reported evidence of the conversation. However, I know that it accords exactly with the line volunteered on a separate occasion at the British Army equipment exhibition to the Chief of Defence Procurement and Brigadier Last. *[Interruption.]* We do not accept that we have acted improperly in any way towards Boughton and we reject all allegations of intimidation.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I heard the word "lie". I hope that I did not.

Mr. MacNamara: I was saying that the statement that was in the letter was a lie and that the letter had been solicited. I was not saying that the Minister was telling a lie. I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation. I wish only that he had answered my questions.

Mr. Hamilton: I was hoping that we had cleared up this difficulty.

Although we have considered the role of the Army in the nation's defence in general, the House is well aware that our principal task is to fulfil our commitment to NATO. If deterrence fails and war comes again to Europe, that means that BAOR will be fighting in Germany.

We have every reason to be proud of the professionalism and dedication of our soldiers and we can be confident that they have the will and the equipment to withstand a conventional attack from the forces of the Warsaw pact—for a time.

However, we have to accept that the Soviet Union and its allies have an overwhelming superiority of numbers in

[Mr. Hamilton]

both men and equipment. However brave our men, however deadly their bullets and missiles, the conventional superiority of the Warsaw pact forces could well prove decisive. The NATO allies would do well to hold out against a major sustained attack.

How is it then that we have managed to deter the Soviet Union from war? As the House knows, since 1967 NATO has had a policy known as flexible response which does not rule out the use of nuclear weapons if conventional defence is seen to be failing. Such use could, of itself, halt the advance of Warsaw pact countries, but it would also be a powerful signal to the Soviet Union that it was running the risk of escalation and, ultimately, an unacceptable degree of damage.

The Soviets know that and realise the great dangers of undertaking any military adventure in Europe which could lead, ultimately, to a war from which neither side could possibly emerge victorious. That is at the heart of the theory and practice of deterrence and it has worked since 1945.

The Labour party seeks to change NATO's nuclear policy, the policy which keeps the peace in Europe. Labour seeks to render unprotected our troops, and those of our American allies, by removing their nuclear weapons. Surely the nub of the argument is the fact that even the best equipped and most highly trained armies of the world are defenceless if their enemy has nuclear weapons and they do not.

Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev—or at least his generals—must be living in the fervent hope of a Labour victory at the next election in this country. If Labour wins, Britain will disarm unilaterally while the strategic and theatre nuclear arsenals of the Soviet Union will remain virtually intact, even if the Kremlin makes the meaningless gesture of matching our disarmament missile for missile.

Not only has the Labour party adopted a policy which will strip our troops in this way, and which promises the abandonment of the national strategic guarantee, which every British Government since the war has thought necessary, but it threatens the NATO alliance in a way in which the Soviet Union could never do.

Labour's proposals to close American nuclear bases in the United Kingdom would destabilise NATO and encourage that minority of Americans who say that the United States has no business defending Europe anyway. A number of senior Americans believe that the effect on NATO would be absolutely catastrophic. I can say only that it is fortunate that the British people will never let it be put to the test.

It is well known that many in the United States are growing increasingly frustrated at what they see as Europe's lack of commitment to defend itself. A refusal by the United Kingdom to share the burden in Europe will only increase the strength of the American lobby which argues for United States' withdrawal.

Labour politicians are keen to reassure themselves that Europe must remain America's front line. However, it does not need a great leap of imagination to foresee their policies encouraging a minority in the United States to press for American defence policy to be confined to the shores of the United States, and for Europe to assume the role of being no more than another buffer zone.

It is no good the Opposition saying that savings on Trident would be spent on conventional arms to make up the difference. This was referred to by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North and my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham. What that money will buy will not make up the difference. At most, it may buy two armoured divisions—about 300 tanks. At the same time, the Warsaw pact already has about 30,000 more tanks than NATO, of which 25,000 are to be found in eastern Europe. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State described earlier the increasing capability of the Warsaw pact. What would deter the occupants of the Kremlin more — Trident or another 300 tanks in a British corps which had no tactical nuclear weapons to respond to theirs? Such improvement in our conventional capability is no deterrent. It might delay the moment of reckoning; it certainly would not affect the outcome.

Let us examine the claim from the Opposition that all the savings on Trident would be spent on conventional defence. Am I alone in finding that claim almost incredible? When one considers Labour's commitment to increase public expenditure by £28 billion a year, are we really expected to believe that a Labour Government will continue to maintain level funding on defence despite the difficulties that they will meet in fulfilling their commitments to spend massively in other areas of the public sector?

NATO cannot afford to have an expensive and protracted conventional war fought over its territory. It has been NATO's nuclear capacity that has deterred our enemies and prevented a third world war, another conventional war in Europe.

The Leader of the Opposition said that NATO's defence policy rests on increasingly untenable assumptions. They are not untenable assumptions, but unpalatable facts for any potential aggressor. It is his assumptions which are untenable, not ours or NATO's.

The right hon. Gentleman has said that he is not prepared for his country to die for him. I have no idea what that was supposed to mean, and I suspect that he has not either, but it sounded rather good and that was probably enough for him.

The reality is that Europe without nuclear weapons brings the possibility of war closer as the continent becomes safer for conventional warfare. The likelihood of millions of Britons dying for the right hon. Gentleman becomes through his policies greater rather than less.

The truth is that the Labour party cannot admit the real choice that it offers over defence policy. That choice is either collective security as a member of a defensive alliance which relies on nuclear weapons as the final guarantee, or isolated neutralism.

No other state in NATO rejects the nuclear element of the Alliance's policies, because our allies can see that we are all faced by a nuclear threat.

There are many Opposition Members who would like to see the Labour party adopt not some but all of CND's policies—we have heard from one or two of them this evening—by breaking with our NATO allies and going down the neutralist road. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is proud of being a member of CND. If he is a member of CND, presumably he wants to follow its policies, and there are many other such members of the Labour party. I cannot see how the hon. Gentleman can be a member of CND without wanting to see its policies followed through.

The Labour party will find that it is unrepresentative of the British people on the issue of defence as it is on so many others.

Britons have fought in two world wars in Europe and have no wish to be drawn into another. They realise that unilateral disarmament makes a third world war more likely, not less. That is why they will reject the Opposition's defence policy at the next election and support the Government's well-tried principles which have given us peace in Europe since 1945.

Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the three motions in the name of the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox).

Ordered,

That Mr. Eric Forth be discharged from the Employment Committee and Mr. Warren Hawksley be added to the Committee. *[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection].*

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Stern be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Jonathan Sayeed be added to the Committee. *[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection].*

Ordered,

That Mr. Tony Favell be discharged from the Social Services Committee and Mr. Patrick McLoughlin be added to the Committee. *[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection].*

British Coal (House Sales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

10 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity of an Adjournment debate to raise the important and pressing problem of the houses that are currently being sold by British Coal.

Since 1976, British Coal has sold 70,000 of its houses to owner-occupiers at advantageous rates, and that has gone satisfactorily. However, nearly 20,000 houses are now left, which, in the main, are inhabited by elderly tenants, widows and so on, many of them pensioners who have served a lifetime in the mines, who are too old to take on a mortgage and who have no wish to be saddled with a mortgage at their time of life.

In addition, many of the houses are unfit and would not obtain a mortgage from a building society because of structural problems. In Nottinghamshire, where my constituency is, there are 4,200 such houses. In my constituency alone, there are 1,026. Of the two district councils that cover my constituency, Bassetlaw has 723 and Mansfield has 883. About 325 of the Nottinghamshire houses are defective and would have great problems in attracting a mortgage from anywhere.

So far, British Coal has pursued a policy of putting such houses up for auction and it intends to put some out to tender. The way that that policy has been carried out has caused a great deal of discontent. Many of the houses being sold wholesale in that way have fetched prices as low as £3,000. In a recent auction at the Kensington Hilton on 11 December, 149 properties in Wakefield were sold for an average price of £3,600. Fifty-five houses were categorised as having defects under the Housing Defects Act 1984. There were 55 in Staffordshire Moorlands which realised £235,000, and, at the Connaught Rooms, 151 properties fetched £618,000. In other words, an approximate price of less than £4,000 was paid per house.

Obviously, when such prices have been arrived at at auctions, property speculators everywhere have pricked up their ears and descend en masse for what looks like a good bargain. There has been strong criticism of the way in which British Coal has sold those houses, not just from hon. Members but from no less a body than the National Housing and Town Planning Council. In its magazine the council said that tenants are given just three months to make one of the most important and difficult decisions of their lives. Notification of the timetable for disposal within a local authority area was far too short and some British Coal areas are even refusing the common courtesy of telling the local authorities when the houses are coming up for sale.

Some houses were recently sold in my constituency and the local council found out only as a result of a small advert in the local weekly giveaway newspaper three days before the auction took place. There is strong criticism by the National Housing and Town Planning Council to the effect that the assessment of the purchasers' credibility and suitability as a landlord is not being taken into account by British Coal when literally anyone, no matter what his track record as a landlord, can buy them. Because British Coal insists on selling many houses at auction, controls over who buys them are impossible.

[Mr. Joseph Ashton]

There is also strong criticism about the availability of the names of the landlords. British Coal claims that the purchasers' names is a matter of commercial confidentiality. But surely it should not be selling to people unwilling to register their name publicly. The new landlord and tenant legislation which will go through Parliament this Session with all-party support is trying to stop such practices. British Coal should at least be made to operate to those standards.

It is in the interests of former British Coal tenants that the House and the Department should find some ways and means to help them. Speculators who are suspected of living in Athens have bought the houses. One firm called the Rare Carpet Company in Chelsea has put in bids for them. In places such as Creswell, houses were bought by a speculator for £3,000. Within six months, he had doubled the price and sold them to another speculator for £6,000. In many cases, it is impossible for tenants to have repairs done. Some houses were bought in Aston, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), and no rents were collected for 10 weeks. It is a Greek solicitor who collects the rent.

It appears that, in many areas, speculators are simply moving in to set up a modern form of Rachmanism. They buy these houses wholesale. They know that they are tenanted by elderly people and expect them to be empty within two or three years, in which case they will get as much as £18,000 for them. Of course, if the houses have to be pulled down because they are defective, the new buyers will have the land, and they will easily get planning permission to build on it.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is my hon. Friend aware that, at the 11 December auction at the Kensington Hilton, some houses were sold for £2,600? Previously, the occupiers, aged miners, had been offered them for £3,600. Within days of the auction, the new owners knocked on those people's doors and offered them at £3,600, with a £1,000 profit in two to three days.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is right. I went to a meeting of the Tenants Federation in Mansfield last Saturday. It is trying to form a nationwide federation of tenants of British Coal houses because of what is happening. People go around knocking on doors of elderly people at 10.30 pm. They ask who lives in the house, how old they are, what their state of health is and what repairs need to be done. Forms have been sent. The Overseas Commodities Group attaches a £1 coin with a piece of sellotape to the bottom of the form. The form asks:

"Why was the freehold not bought when it was offered by the Coal Board? Is the house in good repair? Does it need electric wiring? How many people live there?

Obviously, those questions are asked with the intention of making a quick profit and a quick killing.

Not all the houses are defective. In Meden Vale, in my constituency, some were built in 1963. Because of the pressure applied by Members of Parliament, the auctions that were due to take place next week of 400 houses in Thurnscoe in Yorkshire and about 25 houses in Warsop in my constituency have been postponed by the Coal Board, but only for a month, so that we may have this debate. Because the House was in recess, we managed to apply some pressure to postpone the auctions.

Because British Coal must dispose of all these houses, the remaining 20,000 must go by September 1988. Many think that this is a prelude to possible privatisation if the Tories win the next election. When we met the British Coal board leaders Sir Robert Haslam and Mr. Kenneth Cousins, the reaction we received was unsympathetic. They simply said that they are in the business of selling coal, not renting houses. Frankly, their attitude to many of their employees, who worked 30 or 40 years in the pits, who coughed up their lungs, and who travelled down from Newcastle and Durham and Scotland when the pits shut, to work in Nottingham, was deplorable.

Tenants federations have been formed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) said, when he went to that auction, the sellers were scared of demonstrations outside the auctions, driving down the prices. In many cases, the Coal Board was worried about demonstrations.

There is a simple answer to the problem of absentee landlords not doing repairs and of tenants not being properly looked after. It is to allow councils to buy the houses. For instance, in my constituency, both Bassetlaw and Mansfield councils wish to buy these houses. It is not just a matter of doing repairs on the houses. Many of them are next to slag heaps. The environments are poor and need to be landscaped. Weeds are growing out of the gutters. The pavements need proper attention. They are derelict areas. They are beginning to decline into a state of decay and disrepair. When an absentee landlord owns many houses in a street, it is difficult to get this sort of work done.

Bassetlaw and Mansfield councils have said that they are willing to buy these houses at a fair price. It is much cheaper to buy a house at £6,000 than to build a new council house at £20,000. It is common sense for the councils to buy the houses, because they will get their money back in rent in two or three years. That is why the speculators want these houses. Fair rents of £17.40 a week have beeen set on some. The tenants are being charged £15, so the speculators will immediately increase the rent by £2.40. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has said that, in Elsecar in his constituency, the speculators' first action was to knock on the door and ask for £100 before starting on any improvements.

This serious problem affects nearly 20,000 houses. What stops councils from buying these British Coal houses? It is not cash. Bassetlaw council gained £6 million from selling off council houses, as the Government forced it to do. Mansfield council gained £5 million from receipts of council house sales. Those councils are willing to use that money, but the Government will not let them do so. The Government's arbitrary, dogmatic attitude is not to allow councils to use the cash from council house sales.

That is pretty stupid, but even more stupid is the fact that the law in Scotland is different. Scottish councils can use and are using that cash to buy the British Coal's houses. East Lothian council is actively negotiating to buy 130 British Coal houses. The funding comes from the authority's capital allocation. The negotiations are not subject to Scottish Office approval. I do not want to bore the House, but the facts and figures which the Library has given me should be put on the record. The Library's letter states:

"local authorities . . . cannot contain general borrowing approval for the Municipalisation. Circular 9/85 Capital

programmes—Annex A issued in March 1985—gives the types of activity which receive block borrowing approval; municipalisation is excluded without the consent of the Secretary of State".

That is what the Adjournment debate is all about. We are asking the Under-Secretary of State to bring English local authorities into line with Scottish local authorities. That can be done. The letter states:

"A large number of housing authorities in England therefore could buy NCB houses since most authorities are no longer receiving housing subsidy."

These houses could be bought by using the capital allowance. The Library's letter continues:

"This presupposes, of course, that the local authorities have sufficient capital receipts to meet the cost of purchase, and that they have not already allocated the prescribed proportion (generally 20 per cent.) which they are allowed to spend in addition to their HIP allocation."

We are asking for the other 80 per cent. to be spent. We want English local authorities to have the same financial allocation that exists in Scotland to give them a chance to buy these housing estates.

I do not know whether the Under-Secretary of State has ever been in a mining area in the north of England. I do not wish to be derogatory, but this shows one of the problems that we have with Conservative Ministers. If the hon. Gentleman has been to that region, he would know that in many areas the metal struts of many houses have rotted and need massive attention. These houses are fetching about £2,500 at auction. The councils admit that in some cases £14,000 is needed to repair them. The Government have made such sums available where tenants have bought houses from the Coal Board. In the past, when councils have bought houses which have been found to be defective, the Government have come up with grants to rectify the problems. The councils are not asking for those grants; they are asking only to be allowed to use their money, just as councils in East Lothian and other parts of Scotland can. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will say that the Secretary of State will allow that to happen.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) for raising this important subject. It is good to see the number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who are showing a keen interest in it. I fully appreciate the anxieties felt in coalfield communities. He has described them, but I can also tell him, and his hon. Friends will confirm, that I went to look at these houese some time ago with members of the Coalfield Communities Campaign, who conducted me on a very full tour. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy for his presence this evening. I know that he shares my interest and wishes to see the best possible outcome for all parties in this matter.

Before I go on to discuss the problems mentioned by the hon. Gentleman and by hon. Members on previous occasions, and the scope that there is for action on these issues, it is necessary for me to sketch in the historical background to the sale of British Coal housing so that we can get a better perspective of what is happening. The National Coal Board became a landlord on vesting day, 1 January 1947. It inherited a stock of 140,000 houses from the Coal Owners whose assets were taken into public ownership. Much of that housing was old and not in a good state of repair. Some of it was subsequently cleared. In the 1950s and the 1960s the National Coal Board, now known as British Coal, built 24,000 more houses under the aegis of the Coal Industry Housing Association, which was subsequently wound up. Some of the total stock of housing was sold to local authorities and some to the sitting tenants at a discount of 25 per cent. progressively over this period. By 1976 the board had disposed of 78,000 houses and a further 86,000 remained in its ownership.

The board decided to withdraw from the provision of housing in 1976, and thought that the disposal of its houses would take 10 years. Tenants were offered 50 per cent. discounts, 100 per cent mortgages and help with legal fees. By 1985 the board had 27,000 houses left, and it decided to complete the sale of these houses in three years. The terms were that tenants be given three months in which to decide whether they were interested in buying. We must remember that the option had been open to them since 1976. If they decided not to buy, the properties were to be sold to local authorities and housing associations. Failing that, they would be released on the open market.

To date, 69 per cent. of British Coal's stock of houses, the vast majority, have been sold to the tenants and a further 20 per cent. to local authorities and housing associations. The expectation is that the majority of the remaining 15,700 houses will be sold to sitting tenants, local authorities and housing associations — not necessarily in the same proportions. Therefore, the number of houses that will remain to be sold to private landlords will be very small, particularly when seen in relation to the enormous numbers of houses that were once owned by the board. The vast majority of the sales have been successful and untroubled by complications.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene on this point about the sale of houses, because in my constituency, in Alton in Leeds, there is an estate of 210 houses that were owned by British Coal. These were sold last year. I should like to quote from a letter that I received from the chairman of the housing committee in Leeds, Councillor Bill Kilgallon. The letter says:

"The Airey form of construction, and likely long-term remedial costs associated with these, appears to have frightened off some of the speculators, although it now seems that a London property firm, Manchester Square Associates, are the purchasers . . . Officers have met managing agents for this organisation but their long-term intentions are not known, apart from the site having been offered for sale, by them, in recent weeks."

In other words, there is a knock-on effect for the tenants of the houses. The estate is deteriorating and there is no specified programme for what is to happen to it. That is the situation that confronts the tenants on the estates in these areas. Would the Minister take that on board and try to do something to stop this kind of Rachmanism that we find in the sale of British Coal houses?

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Member will know that I always take careful note of points like that which are made to me, and I certainly undertake to look into what he has said. I repeat that the vast majority of the sales have been successful and untroubled by complications. This evening we are talking about a small minority of houses. Nevertheless the points raised by the hon. Member and by his hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) will be taken into account by us.

I understand that the board built over 6,000 of the prefabricated reinforced concrete houses, known as PRC

[Mr. Tracey]

houses for short. They are now designated under the housing defects legislation. Over two thirds were sold to sitting tenants before it was known that they were of a defective type, and many of these will be entitled to assistance from their local authority under those provisions, provided that they bought before the cut-off date for their type of house. British Coal has been given no financial assistance to deal with its remaining PRC houses and does not believe that its tenants should take on the potentially heavy liability of defective housing.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I am delighted to hear the Minister undertaking to look at all the points raised by Opposition Members. I can only speak as I find. I have been dealing with this problem for 12 months. British Coal has been co-operative, has given me a moratorium on any PRC houses, has allowed my tenants time to explore all the avenues for buying.

Two years ago, if a local authority or a housing association were to buy, British Coal allowed a 30 per cent. discount. That has gone. I would like the Minister to look into this to see whether his Department can reintroduce it. We have to have a policy on PRC houses because some day they will have to be repaired. It is no good bucking the issue now when we know for certain that the taxpayer will have to pick up the bill later on.

Mr. Tracey: I can certainly confirm what my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) said. I can confirm that he has been in touch with British Coal on behalf of his constituents, and has had considerable success. British Coal has said that it will not sell these PRC houses to its tenants and it has for the moment suspended auctions on this sort of house, but I shall be saying later that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and colleagues from that Department and from the Department of the Environment will be seeing British Coal and will take these further points to it. I would point out that only 700 PRC houses remain to be sold. That is all. That is a very small proportion of the total of 15,000 houses from the British Coal estates which remain to be sold.

Although it is a public body, British Coal has, of course, been a very large private landlord. Its tenants are protected by the Rent Acts. It has decided it does not wish to be a landlord any longer, and this is consistent with the Government's policy generally on the disposal of public sector houses and land. This decision, and decisions on the way it chooses to withdraw from the rental market, have been entirely the responsibility of British Coal's management.

At the same time it, and any body to whom it may sell its properties are bound by the Rent Acts and the Landlord and Tenants Acts with certain inescapable obligations prescribed by that legislation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment can no more dictate British Coal's policies than he can any other landlord's. He can offer assistance or advice if it is wanted; it would not be proper for him to intervene. Hon. Members of course fully realise that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why can they not do that in Scotland?

Mr. Tracey: I shall deal with Scotland in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and I are indeed alive to the problems that are alleged to have been occurring and are preparing to discuss them with the management of British Coal. Our two Departments are in contact on the issues and share a common concern that we should reach the best solution for the tenants compatible with the Government's objectives that British Coal should reach break-even by 1988-89.

I think it would be helpful if I say a few words about some of the problems raised this evening by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw. It has been alleged that some of the houses sold at auction have then been resold quickly, and that the tenants do not know who their new landlord is. I must say quite clearly that tenants have a legal right to know who their landlord is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell them."] I am telling the House that now. That is a fact. A new landlord must inform tenants of his name and address when he acquires the property. The tenant may ask for if from the agent or person who collects the rent, and the agent must supply it within 21 days. The agent or landlord may be fined up to £2,000 for failing to meet these requirements. I am prepared to tell the House that I believe that it is deplorable if landlords or their agents are breaking the law in this respect.

It has also been alleged that the new landlords are failing to tell tenants what their rent is when they take over the property, demanding large arrears payments and then initiating possession proceedings against tenants who fail to pay. The tenants, I make it quite clear, are protected by the Rent Acts under their new landlords as they were under British Coal. They are entitled to have fair rents registered for their property. They are entitled to a rent book if they pay their rent weekly. They do not have to pay anything more than the fair rent, and a new landlord cannot charge them an additional sum on top or take them to court for failing to pay it. A landlord cannot evict a tenant without going through the proper processes of the law. A tenant in arrears may be taken to court, but the court will award possession to the landlord only if it thinks it is reasonable to do so. If landlords are breaking the law, I deplore it. I cannot say this too strongly. I hope this debate will bring the tenants' rights to the attention of such landlords and, if any have failed in their statutory duties, that they set about complying with the law as soon as possible.

I believe the hon. Member's own authority has bought some British Coal houses at auction out of its capital receipts. I do not feel in general that this is the best use of resources, but it may have made sense to the authority in this particular case. There are restrictions on the amount of capital receipts that local authorities can use in any one year because the use of those receipts for capital spending does affect the public sector borrowing requirement. Capital receipts which are not spent immediately are mostly used to reduce borrowing; they diminish public borrowing in the year in which they arise, but must be replaced by fresh borrowings when they come to be used for capital spending. I remind the House that the external debt of English local authorities is already about £30 billion. We are not depriving authorities of their receipts, but simply requiring their use to be spread over time.

On the point made by the hon. Member about Scottish authorities, they are buying British Coal houses with their capital receipts. I must say that the Scottish capital control system in important respects is different from the English

system. Although Scottish authorities are free to use the full amount of capital receipts arising in a year they cannot carry forward unused capital receipts to future years. To change to this system would disadvantage English authorities who can of course carry forward unused capital receipts. I do not think English authorities would want the Scottish system.

I sympathise with the view that the solution might be in some cases for registered housing associations to take over these properties. The Housing Corporation has particular priorities within its approved development programme, and was given a £20 million increase specifically for new schemes mixing 30 per cent. grant with private finance. Within its priorities it is for the corporation to decide on the allocation of its resources. It will need to see specific costed proposals from registered housing associations on these properties and it is for it to decide on each scheme on its merits.

May I say that 89 per cent. of the 158,000 houses disposed of to date by British Coal have been successfully sold——

The Question having been proposed at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House, without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Renfrew District (SDA Expenditure)

1. **Mr. Allen Adams** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish Development Agency money has been spent in Renfrew district since 1981.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): In the period April 1981 to November 1986 the agency has spent a total of £15·6 million in Renfrew, representing 2·4 per cent. of its total budget.

Mr. Adams: Is the Minister aware that 250,000 people live within the Renfrew district and that over the past decade more than 20,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry in that area? Only last week 600 jobs were lost at Babcock and Walcock Power Ltd., which is a high tech industry based in Renfrew, yet the Scottish Development Agency has spent only 2 per cent. of its overall budget for the past five years in this area. That is disgraceful. What does the Secretary of State intend to do to increase that percentage, and does he intend to instruct the Scottish Development Agency to take account of the dire and grave situation that now exists at Babcock and Walcock in Renfrew?

Mr. Lang: I recognise the problems of Babcock's, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman appreciates that there is a worldwide recession in the demand for power generating equipment. The development of the Scottish Development Agency's initiative reflects the concern in the Renfrew district. I shall meet the district council next week, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall be as sympathetic and helpful as I can.

Mrs. McCurley: Will my hon. Friend take into account the fact that we have been able to attract the firm of Compaq to my constituency of Renfrew, West. If we are able to attract such firms, it would be advisable for the Minister to initiate action along the lines of the successful Inverclyde initiative, perhaps on a larger scale. Will my hon. Friend consider granting special status for Renfrew, bearing in mind that traditional areas such as that district have difficulty in competing with the new towns and the enterprise packages that they can offer?

Mr. Speaker: May I ask for brief questions?

Mr. Lang: I recognise the problems mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley). We are, indeed, anxious to get the Renfrew initiative under way. We are ready to give active and speedy consideration to any viable opportunities.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that Compaq has been attracted to Erskine, and about 365 jobs will be created there in the next four years. This is an important success for Locate in Scotland.

Mr. Buchan: It will take the next four years to create half the number of jobs that we lost last week. Does the Minister accept that a decade ago over 20,000 women were working in the cotton industry in the same area, but that now there are only about 1,100? The entire Linwood factory has been decimated. Originally there were 8,000 workers, now there are none. Does the Minister accept that at the time of the Linwood closure, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. Curley), the Secretary of State promised special measures but they have not come forward? Compaq is good news, but we have not been given a good deal.

Mr. Lang: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise the importance of the initiative that we are considering and the success that we have had in broadening the manufacturing base of the Scottish economy. I recall the hon. Gentleman's prognostication in August 1978 that unemployment would rise to over 3 million, whichever party was in power.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given the problems faced by Renfrew district and every other area in Scotland, what possible help can it be to impose, this week of all weeks, and today of all days, further moratoria on the payment of regional development grants in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom? How long will the moratoria last and why, having lost 192,000 manufacturing jobs in Scotland, are the Government now destroying the means by which industrial recovery could take place?

Mr. Lang: I am sure the hon. Gentleman recognises the substantial take up of regional development aid under this Government. As he knows, two systems overlap at present, and this has created a bulge which will lead to a certain waiting period, but not an intolerable one.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said about a meeting with Renfrew district and about the Renfrew initiative, but does he agree that a successful strategy for Renfrew must be based on successes in the area, such as the substantial expansion plans at Glasgow airport and the success and expansion of English Sewing at Neilston in Renfrewshire, in my constituency? Is it not appalling that Opposition Members should concentrate so much on the bad news instead of giving a balanced presentation?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to those important successes. I understand that investment at the Neilston plant totals about £7 million and will create

approximately 760 jobs, which is rather more than was envisaged when originally planned. I believe that it is the major thread manufacturing plant in the English Sewing group.

Mr. Dewar: I presume that the Minister is familiar with the contents of the Government expenditure plans for 1987-88 to 1989-90, which were published at noon today. He will know, therefore, that they contain an announcement of further moratoria on the payment of regional development grant to cover new regional development grant as well as old grant. How long will these moratoria last? What will they save the Treasury, or, more important, on the other side of the coin, what will they cost Scottish industry?

What possible defence can there be for weakening a central plank of industrial policy when bad news crowds in on almost every side and when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has said, the Department of Employment's own figures show that between June 1979 and June 1986 we lost 192,000 jobs in manufacturing industry in Scotland? What possible justification can there be for further cuts in the industrial incentives and industry budget for Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I understand that the waiting period for RDG2 will be about two months, compared with four months for RDG1. That waiting period reflects the bulge that has arisen as a result of the substantial number of applications. However, the provision for next year is some 26 per cent. above what was originally anticipated.

Council House Sales

3. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland in each year since 1983.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): In 1983, 17,800 houses were sold to sitting tenants, including tenants of the new towns and the Scottish Special Housing Association. In 1984 the number was 16,000; and in 1985, 14,800. A final figure for 1986 is not yet available.

Mr. Knox: Can my hon. Friend tell us whether the number of applications to buy council houses in Scotland is on an upward or downward trend?

Mr. Ancram: In the second quarter of 1986 the number of applications was running at about 2,000 each month, which was very encouraging. That is about 20 per cent. up on the same quarter in 1985 and is only slightly lower than the peak levels in 1983. We believe that that shows the healthy continuing impact of the right-to-buy policy in Scotland.

Mr. Henderson: Does the north-east Fife district still hold the record for being the Scottish district council which has enabled the greatest number of its tenants to buy their own homes? If so, does that mean that more funds are available to meet today's housing needs for those who wish to remain tenants?

Mr. Ancram: I cannot say whether that district council still holds the record, but it certainly has a very high, successful rate of council house sales. It is a lesson to other councils that the resources released by the sale of council houses can be used to deal with the serious structural problems that exist in the rest of Scotland's public housing stock.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

4. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the teaching unions about conditions for teachers in schools: and if he will make a statement.

6. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current state of the teachers' pay dispute.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Discussions during December within the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee resulted in new agreements on pay and conditions acceptable to the Government, the local authorities and the teachers' representatives. The proposals agreed offer teachers an improved salary structure and prospects, while clarifying teachers' duties and providing a more sensible approach to conditions of service.

I hope that teachers will accept this package, so that parents and pupils can look forward to the end of this long-running dispute and a return to normality in Scottish schools.

Mr. Strang: Did the Secretary of State notice that the Main arguments for a "Yes" vote used by the Educational Institute of Scotland in the teachers' ballot was that a bad deal was the best that could be obtained from this Conservative Government and that the alternative was an imposed settlement? Why have the Government refused to restore teacher salaries to Houghton levels? Why have they attacked the professional status of teachers by stipulating duties and hours of work? Why have they failed to provide the additional staffing and material resources which the children in our state schools so desperately need?

Mr. Rifkind: For a start, in objecting to conditions of service, the hon. Gentleman is disagreeing with every Labour-controlled local authority in Scotland. He will be well aware that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Labour-controlled education authorities have been as insistent as anyone else on that aspect of the negotiated package. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should consult his colleagues.

The hon. Gentleman should also realise that the pay scale — the 16·4 per cent. increase — was the level recommended by the committee under Sir Peter Main. It has proved acceptable to the teachers' representatives and, therefore, should be acceptable to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kirkwood: Notwithstanding the fact that the Government have seriously mishandled the issue ever since the Main report was produced and that there have been consequential effects in the low morale in our classrooms, is the Secretary of State aware that my right hon. Friends and I will urge the teachers to accept the new agreement that has been struck? It would help to obtain a positive response from the teaching profession if he would say what plans the Government have to ensure that teachers do not fall inexorably behind in future pay claims?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman is being courteous and kind enough to recommend teachers to accept the proposed agreement, he might also acknowledge that that agreement has proved possible only because of the huge extra resources being made available by the Government to ensure increases in teachers' salaries.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the present likely settlement is due to his wisdom in setting up the Main committee last year? Does he agree that the vote is being taken virtually on the Main committee's recommendations and that the parents and the children of Scotland will be highly delighted with his achievement during the past year?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend. Although the agreement that has been reached departs in several significant ways from the recommendation by Sir Peter Main and his colleagues, any fair and objective commentator would agree that without the report that Sir Peter Main produced some months ago it is almost inconceivable that we could now have reached an agreement that is endorsed by the teachers, the local authorities and the Government.

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State will, of course, recognise that we have severe reservations about the way in which this very difficult matter has been handled. Does he accept that there will be relief, certainly among Opposition Members, if a settlement is reached in the dispute? I am sure that parents, the public and the vast majority of teachers do not want a return to confrontation.

In the circumstances, and with voting still in progress, would it not be helpful for the Secretary of State to confirm his and the Government's commitment to the staffing review, which is an integral part of the settlement, and to the funding of that and other items outwith the actual pay structure—such as class cover for absences and the phasing out of composite classes?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for declaring that he would welcome an acceptance by the teachers of the current negotiated position. The personal contribution that he has made to ensure that the atmosphere in which these matters have been discussed during the past few weeks has helped towards what we all hope will be a settlement.

The Government have accepted the recommendation in the Main report that there should be a staffing review, and that is well understood.

Forestry

5. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy for forestry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): The policy remains as set out in statements by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), now the Secretary of State for Defence, on 10 December 1980 and, as far as the sale of Forestry Commission land is concerned, on 8 November 1984.

Mr. Maclennan: Is it not extraordinary that, in six years, the Government's forestry policy has not changed? Is there not a need to encourage the expansion of afforestation as an alternative crop, in the light of the surplus production from agricultural land and to increase the timber industry? Is it not also important that farmers, crofters and smallholders should be able to participate in that development? What proposals does the Minister have for the control of afforestation? Does he favour a licensing system, which seems to be widely favoured throughout Scotland?

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman asked several questions. Forestry policy, as with all policies, is kept under review. Obviously, we are aware of all the points that the hon. Gentleman made. It is right that forestry policy should take into account matters such as conservation and the environment. It should also take into account the problem of agricultural surpluses, the need to find other uses for agricultural land and, indeed, the useful and important jobs that are provided by forestry in the countryside. I wonder what the hon. Gentleman's view is on the rather more controversial issue of forestry in his own constituency, where important jobs are being provided.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend understand that there is great and growing concern about the widespread afforestation of the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland? Will he ensure that forestry applications in those areas are taken by the Forestry Commission to the Nature Conservancy Council for discussion so that this unique habitat can be adequately protected?

Mr. MacKay: From my correspondence, I am well aware of the wide interest in the flow country, usually outside the flow country itself, where perhaps the locals — like the locals in most of the highlands — take a slightly more relaxed view of these matters because they see both sides of the issue. There is no question of the whole of the flow country being covered by conifers. Most of the land outside the areas already planted or approved for planting is either not suitable for forestry or will not be available for it. We have set up a group of officials to consider the future use of land in this part of Scotland and the NCC is represented in that group.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Is the Minister aware that, contrary to the impression he gave, the level of employment provided has been extremely small, even in the Highland region? Is he further aware of the criticism by the chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board that the environment has been radically altered by insensitive planting and that most of that planting has been done by distant companies operating tax fiddles? When will the Scottish Office examine Scottish forestry policy?

Mr. MacKay: The present procedure whereby the Forestry Commission consults several bodies before approving planting grants to the private sector and, indeed, before it decides on its own planting policy, works reasonably well. Forest planting is improving. Foresters in both the private and public sectors are more aware of environmental issues than they once were. About 40,000 jobs are provided in the forestry industry in Great Britain, either directly or in the downstream industries that depend on the raw material coming out of our forests.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware that substantial forests are contained within my constituency and that they are an important part of the local economy. Does he agree that any nation that has a £4,000 million import bill for timber must look carefully at the policy for more afforestation, that there is substantial scope for it in Scotland and that it should be encouraged substantially through the private sector?

Mr. MacKay: I first welcome back my hon. Friend to the House. We look forward to hearing from him on a number of issues. He highlights an important point,

namely, that forest product imports, running at £4·5 billion, are our major single import. Therefore, the increase of afforestation is important for that reason, as well as for many others.

Mr. Kennedy: May I reassure the Minister on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that he will reply to the Minister's question as soon as possible? May I resume my hon. Friend's point with specific reference to Glenelg in my constituency, a socially fragile area as regards employment, as the previous Secretary of State said in the announcement to which the Minister referred in his initial answer? Surely the handling of that raises my hon. Friend's point — that if there were more local participation in forestry some of the anxiety would, perhaps, be overcome or at least partially allayed. Instead, there have been rather dubious dealings on the possible disposal of that asset.

Mr. MacKay: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. There is room for forestry, both on a large scale, financed by outside means, and for farm or estate forestry. It is important for us to find ways to encourage that. The Government are giving a good deal of thought to those matters at present.

Mr. Corrie: Is my hon. Friend aware that the NCC is designating as SSSIs areas which might contain something of interest so that they cannot be planted? Is that not a gross misuse of present legislation?

Mr. MacKay: I should certainly like to study any case that exhibits that tendency, because, as I remember, designation must be done on the basis of present scientific evidence, not on the basis of something which may or may not happen in future. If my hon. Friend wishes to write to me or my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), who is more directly involved in SSSIs, he should do so.

Mr. Home Robertson: Now that the National Audit Office has joined almost everyone else in criticising the inordinate expense and questionable effects of vast tax handouts to private forestry speculators, including Mr. Terry Wogan and others, in Caithness and Sutherland, will the Government reconsider the scope of those incentives and the adoption of more positive incentives and policies for both the Forestry Commission and the private sector to expand woodlands sensibly and sensitively, especially in lowland agricultural areas?

Mr. MacKay: I listened to the hon. Gentleman's question and found it difficult to understand what his party's policy would be if, in the unlikely event, it won an election. The present tax arragements for forestry are of long standing and Governments of both parties have gone along with them to encourage private afforestation. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the Labour party is against private afforestation, many people whose jobs depend on it will be interested.

Dundee and Aberdeen Colleges of Education

7. **Mr. Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposed merger of Dundee and Aberdeen colleges of education.

Mr. John MacKay: I have endorsed the main principles in the report of the working party set up to consider the implementation of the decision to merge Aberdeen and Dundee colleges of education, including the report's recommendations for the pre-service rationalisation of community education and secondary teacher training.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister think, in his heart of hearts, that it is nonsense geographically to link two colleges which are 60 miles apart and serve the distinctive areas of east central Scotland and northern Scotland? How does he think that the merger and the rationalisation that will take place will help educational provision in the areas concerned? Will he answer the particular worry expressed in Dundee, that there is an imbalance in the present arrangement in so far as the administration and principal are to be located principally in Aberdeen college, with Dundee reduced to a secondary status?

Mr. MacKay: I cannot agree that the Dundee part of the northern college is being reduced to a secondary status. I remind him of the Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council report which recommended to the Government that we should end up with three non-denominational colleges. This merger is an essential part of our strategy, which we adopted to achieve rationalisation without the closure of a single site. It is important to remember that. With effort on the part of the people in Aberdeen and Dundee, the merger can be made to work. There are important educational advantages in concentrating the services on one site instead of having very small classes indeed on two sites.

Mr. Henderson: Will my hon. Friend accept that many of us feel that the Government were absolutely right to take the line that they have taken? Although it may not be ideal, it is infinitely better than the line recommended by STEAC, and it was supported by the Liberal party, because the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) told the EIS that it was in favour of maintaining the majority of education centres in Scotland. Of course, that implied that the Liberals were prepared to close some. Will my hon. Friend also bear in mind the suggestion for a European education establishment in Dundee?

Mr. MacKay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the choices that were before the Government—the STEAC proposals to close some colleges and what we have put forward, which includes the merger of these two colleges. If and when a definite set of proposals for a European college is submitted for consideration by member states of the Community, I shall certainly wish to see Scotland's claim, including the claim by Dundee, being seriously considered.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister must recognise that it is nonsense to try to suggest that two colleges that are over 60 miles apart can somehow be regarded as one. Beyond that, the secrecy and speed with which this report was cobbled together takes away any attempt by the Government to suggest that any democratic procedure was involved in the drawing up of this plan. The shambles that has resulted from the allocation of various departments to Aberdeen or to Dundee can only be the result of this nonsense of rushing through an undemocratically prepared report.

Mr. MacKay: I cannot agree with the hon. Member that the report has been rushed through. The work was done on a tight time scale, but that was important because it cannot be in anybody's interest for the implementation

of this merger to be drawn out unduly. The working party has demonstrated that the merger can create a new and powerful college by combining the two colleges at Aberdeen and Dundee.

Mrs. McCurley: Will my hon. Friend take into consideration the fact that colleges of education have a local impact, especially on curriculum development and on student teaching practice? Distance does count and has a serious impact.

Mr. MacKay: I appreciate that, and that is one of the reasons why we decided to keep both colleges and not close one, or indeed both, as STEAC might have suggested if one had read it that way. We have decided to keep both colleges, and their facilities will be available for education in both Grampian and Tayside.

Mr. Tom Clark: Will the Minister respond especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and tell the House what precise savings will be made by the proposal that will justify the inconvenience and disrupion that will inevitably arise?

Mr. MacKay: There will obviously be savings in some of the staffing costs. When we dispose of certain properties in the buildings which are not being used now, or will not be used in the future, that will obviously result in major savings. Above all, there are educational points to be made. Both colleges were running with extraordinarily small classes and on an extraordinarily limited coverage of the curriculum. The colleges will be greatly strengthened by concentrating their resources on one or the other in different fields.

Alcohol Rehabilitation Centres

8. **Sir Russell Johnston** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will provide specific financial resources to enable local authorities to make provision for alcohol rehabilitation centres.

Mr. Mackay: No, Sir. It is for local authorities to decide their own spending priorities within the available resources. Government grants are made to voluntary bodies which provide designated places under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980.

Sir Russell Johnston: It is now seven years since the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980 was introduced and we have still only one rehabilitation centre in Scotland. Does the Minister agree that the reason for this is that the Government are unwilling to make any financial commitment beyond three years, and for that reason local authorities are unwilling to take on something for which they feel they will not be able to pay? That policy was again enunciated by the Government in a letter to Highland region in November last year about the proposed centre at Inverness. Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider it there and elsewhere in Scotland?

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman ought to understand what pump-priming is about. It is an exercise to encourage the voluntary sector to set up these projects. We have put a lot of money into them, in capital terms, and we have helped them in the first three years in revenue terms. Indeed, in the case of Albyn House, we have gone on to help it for a fourth year. But these matters are the responsibility of local authorities. We are prepared to back voluntary projects to get them off the ground, and then local authorities will have to take over the main line funding. It is a method of encouraging projects, and I am keen to see more of them. I just wish that more projects would be brought forward.

Mr. Hirst: Is my hon. Friend aware that Low Moss prison and Bishopbriggs have been doing valuable work in the treatment of alcohol offenders? Nevertheless, does my hon. Friend agree that alcohol treatment centres such as Albyn House in Aberdeen are far more appropriate places in which to treat offenders who are guilty of drunken and disorderly offences? Does he agree that if such a change were to come about it would help to reduce prison overcrowding?

Mr. MacKay: I agree that Albyn House has been successful. As I have already said, we are keen to help voluntary projects, if they are brought forward. We have one in Dundee, but we are having an awful lot of trouble with it. It is in trouble with Tayside regional council, which has refused a certificate of registration under the Act to the Dundee proposal. This is very discouraging.

Dr. M. S. Miller: Does the Minister not realise that alcohol is a very intractable problem and that what is required is not merely a local aspect to the treatment and rehabilitation of the people affected but a national aspect? Money needs to be spent on centres to help these people. Sometimes a one-to-one approach is required.

Mr. Mackay: The hon. Gentleman has widened the question a little from designated centres. He is right to say that it is a difficult and intractable problem. The health boards try to play their part by providing facilities and resources and advice to people who have an alcohol problem. Help is also given by some of the voluntary bodies, which do excellent work.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I accept that the Albyn House experiment has been highly successful and is consistent with the objectives of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980, but does the Minister accept that it is both unhelpful and hypocritical of the Government to endorse the principle without supplying resources so that local authorities are able to make such establishments available? Will resources be made available, or will local authorities be rate-capped if they pursue the Government's objectives?

Mr. MacKay: That kind of resource is part and parcel of local authorities' social work resources. As for providing money for social work to local authorities, since the financial year 1982-83 to the one that we are just entering we have increased resources in real terms by about 12 per cent. That is a very significant increase in resources. Local authorities have to look to their priorities. If the hon. Gentleman were to suggest to his friends in COSLA that they should give this group a little higher priority, I might be able to agree with him.

Dornoch Rail Bridge

9. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the Highlands Regional Council report on the Dornoch rail bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The consultant's report is still being studied carefully, but it does not appear to provide justification for the building of a rail bridge.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister not accept that the independent report presents a powerful and emphatic case for the building of the Dornoch rail bridge at the same time as the road bridge? When the Minister has finished studying the report, may I ask him not simply to pass the buck to British Rail but to take the initiative and have discussions with British Rail about how money for the funding of the bridge might be found?

Mr. Ancram: We are looking closely at the report, but our first examination of it shows that the social cost-benefit analysis describes the net present value of the bridge as negative. The hon. Gentleman knows that according to British Rail's analysis last year the revenue at risk was about £120,000, against a very conservative estimate for the cost of building the bridge of £12·7 million. When the spending of public resources is involved, this is a matter that has to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Will my hon. Friend take into account the fact that many people in the central belt question the justification for the priority given to the Dornoch road bridge within the total programme? Will he publish in the House of Commons Library a technical evaluation of the costs and benefits of the Dornoch road bridge?

Mr. Ancram: In building any bridge or any road careful evaluation is made to show the positive benefits resulting from the work. This was done for the Dornoch road bridge and that is why we agreed to go forward with it. As regards a rail link associated with it, if this matter were to be re-opened it would delay severely the beginning of the construction of the road bridge.

Mr. Maclennan: Has the Minister not recongised that the consultants' report called for a cost-benefit analysis to be done and said that it was not possible for Mackay Consultants to do it? Will he therefore finance an independent cost-benefit analysis as a matter of urgency, since the narrow financial appraisal to which he referred and which was conducted by British Rail did not make out the case which Mackay Consultants felt was capable of being made out? Will he please not support his own party's spokesman's view that the road bridge will be delayed? The work on the approach roads could begin while this cost-benefit analysis was going ahead.

Mr. Ancram: On that latter point, I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Were a rail bridge associated with the road bridge to be considered, the design competition which is presently taking place would have to be put off while the design specifications for a rail bridge was drawn up. That would have the effect, as I said earlier, of delaying the start of the construction of the road bridge by a year. This is essentially a matter for British Rail, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the question mark which the building of a rail bridge would place over the Lairg loop.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister reaffirm the excellent case put by the Government for the Dornoch rail link in his own submission to the European regional development fund, which takes into account the fact that the implications of this decision are far wider than the finances of ScotRail and British Rail and could well affect every aspect of life in the north of Scotland in the future? So will he stop passing the buck between his Department, the Highlands region, the Department of Transport and ScotRail and accept his responsibility to take this unique opportunity to secure the future of the north rail line?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman cannot accuse the Government of passing the buck when this is a matter which has to be initiated by British Rail in the first place. British Rail made its own analysis last year, which showed a revenue at risk which was very small in comparison with the total cost of the bridge, and on that basis it did not believe that the project should go ahead. That was British Rail's judgment then, and I have no reason to think that it has changed its mind.

Steel Industry

10. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the chairman of British Steel Corporation to discuss the steel industry in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I meet the chairman of the British Steel Corporation on a regular basis. No date for the next meeting has been arranged.

Mr. Hamilton: When the Minister next meets the British Steel Corporation chairman, will he discuss with him the steel users, many of whom are going out of business? As the Minister is aware, it has been announced today that the Caterpillar Tractor Company in my constituency will be closing within 15 to 18 months, with a loss of 1,121 jobs. As he is also aware, an announcement was made in September, when he was present, of a £62 million investment. Of that investment, £3·1 million of public money has been spent. Is he going to tell us now that he can do nothing about it? If so, what do the Government intend to do about it, because this is a diabolical scandal? This will mean unemployment in Lanarkshire on a 20 per cent. basis. The Secretary of State for Scotland and and the Government have a responsibility to do something about it.

Mr. Rifkind: I very much share the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman over today's announcement affecting the plant at Uddingston. I regret and deplore the decision announced today. It is a decision which is all the more extraordinary because, as the hon. Gentleman has just said, as recently as four months ago the company announced a £62·5 million investment programme to secure the future of the plant. Substantial financial assistance for the project was offered by the Government and accepted by the company. The decision arises from a worldwide review of the company's manufacturing capacity. No consultation with the Government took place prior to today's announcement.

I shall be holding urgent discussions with the company. I understand that the closure will be phased over at least the next year. This gives us the opportunity to explore with the company what can be done to retain operations and employment at the Uddingston facility.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity to remind the chairman of British Steel of the importance of getting across to the people of Scotland the fact that unless steel costs are kept within competitive levels steel users in the United Kingdom, particularly in Scotland, will find themselves uncompetitive and unable to compete?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is very encouraging that British Steel recently announced half-yearly profits of about £68 million, compared with the vast losses that it was making a few years ago. Clearly, the prospects for the steel industry in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom can only be seen to be substantially improved now that the British Steel Corporation is profitable.

Mr. George Robertson: When the Secretary of State meets the chairman of British Steel, will he bear in mind the industrial wasteland being created in Lanarkshire as a result of steel industry and steel-using industry job losses and the fact that the closure of Caterpillar is yet another sickening blow for this area, which has suffered so much? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman recall Lord Young's speech at the Scottish Conservative party conference last year, when he held up the glowing example of the Garnock valley initiative in the creation of jobs where jobs in the steel industry had been lost? If the scale of help given to the Garnock valley is to be an example for Lanarkshire, the amount that will be required for Lanarkshire is more than £500 million. Are the Government willing to give that sort of help to unemployment-hit Lanarkshire?

Mr. Rifkind: I am well aware of the serious employment problems faced by Lanarkshire. As the hon. Gentleman will know, not only does Lanarkshire come within the special development area category, but the Scottish Development Agency is particularly involved in a number of projects with employment implications in the area. Of course, we are always willing to look at any ideas that may be forthcoming to ensure the improvement of employment prospects in Lanarkshire. It is not the only locality with such problems, but I fully appreciate the difficulties faced by the community in that part of Scotland.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the commitment given by the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) to Ravenscraig still stand? If so, would it not be a good idea for the Minister to go to Ravenscraig to talk to the shop stewards there about the balance between low value-added slab and high-quality strip steel and the fact that, in the view of many people, this may well mean that Ravenscraig's future and profitability are gravely at risk?

Mr. Rifkind: I visited Ravenscraig not long ago and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for industry—the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang)—intends to make a similar visit in the relatively near future. We have had the opportunity to discuss matters with the trade unions and management at Ravenscraig. That useful source of information reveals the developments affecting Ravenscraig. I believe that the plant is in a far stronger position than it was some years ago because of the general improvement in the productivity of the individual plant and the increased profitability of the British Steel Corporation.

Mr. Corrie: When my right hon. and learned Friend speaks again to the chairman of the British Steel Corporation, will he tell him of the disappointment of some steel workers in my constituency who have been made redundant and have not yet been given help with retraining or received their redundancy money, although it is well over a year since the plant closed? Can my right hon. and learned Friend speed things up a bit?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall certainly ensure that the matter is drawn to the BSC's attention, to ascertain whether some progress of the kind to which my hon. Friend has referred can be made.

Dr. Bray: Is the Secretary of State aware that Eurofer, the European steel producers association, has undertaken to propose to the European Commission by the end of March the closure of some 5 million tonnes of flat product capacity in Europe? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the chairman of Eurofer is also the chairman of the British Steel Corporation? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an undertaking that those proposed closures will not include any reduction in capacity at the Ravenscraig or Dalzell works?

Mr. Rifkind: With regard to the Eurofer proposals, decisions on the future of any BSC works are subject to the strategy agreed in 1985. It would be for the Steel Corporation to consider in the light of that stategy what part it might play in the development of Eurofer's proposals for Europe as a whole?

Mr. Hirst: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to remind the House and the people of Scotland of the very welcome news recently that BSC intends to spend a further £30 million on new investment at Ravenscraig? Will he reiterate the importance of the corporation being in profit in order to find these funds for new investment?

Mr. Rifkind: The proposed £30 million investment must be good news, as one cannot seriously contemplate the closure of a plant if one is simultaneously proposing investment of that kind. I am aware that the trade unions have called for further investment in the coke ovens at Ravenscraig. I should point out that half the coke ovens should last until the turn of the century. There is good reason to believe that others will last well into the 1990s. Even the trade unions at Ravenscraig now recognise that limited reconstruction of existing ovens should overcome any shortfall in coke supplies during that period.

Mr. Dewar: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that on this side of the House we feel that the decision announced today by Caterpillar is either the result of monumental incompetence by management or soulless cynicism? There cannot be any other explanation of this astonishing turnabout in the last few months. Will he also note our sympathy, which I am sure he shares, for the 1,200 or so people and their families who are so suddenly and unexpectedly facing the dole queue? It is all the more bitter because it is so unexpected after the recent false optimism of the proposed £62 million investment programme. Can the Secretary of State say whether any public money has been put into the firm since the announcement was made, that is, whether there is a public sector debit as a result of the announcement of that investment? If so, can he guarantee that there will be full recovery of that public money?

Can the Secretary of State also say something about what can be done to safeguard this country against such a disgraceful scuttle operation by a firm which seemed to be so firmly established—and I do not mean this in any knocking sense—that it figured in his new year message only a week ago as a firm which was becoming more profitable and competitive, so helping to make employment more secure? It is an appalling condemnation of the

firm. What has happened to face us with this about-turn? Can the Secretary of State also say something more about the moratorium on regional development plans, because it seems extraordinary that this should be announced on the day when we have suffered such a hammer blow from Caterpillar? Does it make sense to delay by even a few months much-needed funds when we are desperately trying to save jobs and build on what is left of Scotland's manufacturing base?

Mr. Rifkind: On his final point, the hon. Gentleman should realise that the proposed two-month period is half that which has been insisted on with regard to RDG 1 until now. With regard to his broader question on Caterpillar, I am not aware of any public funds that have yet been given to the company since the decision in September. Of course, we would take steps to ensure the recovery of public funds if that had happened.

I very much share the sentiments that he expressed, for the simple reason that the decision announced in September of a proposed £62 million investment was itself the result of a very extensive review that the company had carried out into its international operations. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand any development that might have taken place in the relatively short period since September which would justify such a major change in its outlook. I have indicated to the House that I intend to have early discussions with representatives of the company. Fortunately, a significant period will elapse before the proposed closure would come into effect. Therefore, one naturally hopes that that opportunity can be used to ensure some continuation of the plant and indeed of the employment of those who depend on it.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Murder Trials

41. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will make it his policy that bereaved relations of murder victims are informed in advance of the date of the commencement of the trial.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland (Mr. Peter Fraser): Procurators fiscal do give this information to bereaved relatives, but it is not done as a matter of course. The present policy is being reviewed, as my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has stated in his letter to the hon. Gentleman dated 12 January 1987.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Solicitor-General accept that great distress was caused to my constituents when they learnt in a casual conversation with neighbours of the trial of the person accused of murdering their 16-year-old son? Does he accept that that was appalling? Does he accept that it is grossly offensive and insulting for the Lord Advocate to say that it is up to the individuals concerned to make inquiries of the procurator fiscal's office? Will he make sure that the review that is taking place will be based on making machinery available whereby bereaved relatives of murder victims will be notified automatically of the date when the trial is to take place?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's constituents were upset. I should explain that until recently there was probably no problem over this, inasmuch as one or more of the parents would be required to attend as witnesses to give formal evidence of identification. For good and proper reason, we seek as best we can to avoid that happening. I want to dispel any impression that there is any deliberate policy to avoid telling parents or spouses of these matters, and it is for that reason that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has said that he will carry out a review to ensure that the anxieties that the hon. Gentleman expresses do not arise again.

Classified Information (Legal Proceedings)

42. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how, in considering possible legal proceedings arising from alleged breaches of confidentiality in relation to classified information, the Lord Advocate distinguishes between his roles as prosecutor in criminal proceedings and as nominal plaintiff in civil proceedings.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, in deciding whether to prosecute any alleged offence relating to the disclosure of classified information, exercises a discretion as public prosecutor wholly independently of the Government. In acting in civil proceedings to restrain such disclosure, he does so on the authority of the Crown or of the appropriate public Department in terms of the Crown Suits (Scotland) Act 1857.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Solicitor-General for Scotland find it difficult to agree that the Lord Advocate and Kerr Fraser would have made an altogether much better job than did Sir Robert Armstrong, for the Attorney-General, in the Wright case?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I share the hon. Gentleman's views of the abilities of Sir William Kerr Fraser. It would be entirely wrong, however, for me to draw any comparisons between him and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Solicitor-General for Scotland say in how many instances either he or the Lord Advocate has had to take no part in legal proceedings because of a conflict of interest or because of some other activity that he or his noble and learned Friend undertakes, such as being a Commissioner of Northern Lighthouses? Is the example that I have given an isolated one, or are there a number of different areas of public offices or other activities where the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor-General for Scotland have a conflict of roles?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I cannot think immediately of any other situation where there might be a conflict of interest. In the instance to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, I am not entirely sure that there was a conflict of interest. To avoid any apparent disagreement or any apparent indication that we had acted with some impropriety, both my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Advocate and I declined to take any part in the case to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Salmon Act 1986

45. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he has had discussions with procurators fiscal on the implementation of the poaching clause in the Salmon Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: While I have not discussed this provision with procurators fiscal, a Crown Office circular has been issued to them dealing with the implementation of the Act in general.

Sir Hector Monro: Having enjoyed some poached salmon today with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for fisheries, may I ask my hon. and learned Friend to bear in mind the importance of salmon fishing to the tourist industry and to the the development of hotels in Scotland? Will he bring home to procurators fiscal and all involved that we must take a tough line with poachers if we are to achieve advancement in this area?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am sure he is aware that the Salmon Act 1986 came into force last week. It is for that reason that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, myself and the Crown Office have brought to the attention of procurators fiscal what is contained within the Act and made it clear to them that the provisions that deal with what might be described now as the statutory reset of poached salmon should be implemented wherever appropriate.

Mr. Canavan: Given the draconian penalties laid down in the Salmon Act 1986, which mean that someone who is in possesion of a salmon in certain circumstances can be sent to prison for two years, and to avoid any accusations that the Crown Office is less than even-handed, will the Solicitor-General for Scotland assure ordinary working-class poachers who take an occasional salmon for the pot that they will get off with a friendly warning from the procurator fiscal in the same way as the Duke of Argyll and his cronies, who have been net fishing illegally for years in Loch Fyne and getting away with it scot-free?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The hon. Gentleman should be aware, as everyone else is, of the importance of salmon fishing to the tourist industry in Scotland. He should not think, even in a casual and half-comical fashion, that there is anything funny about the level of poaching in Scotland's rivers, which is causing real problems. If the hon. Gentleman would like to move away from the central belt occasionally and travel to the east coast of Scotland, the north-east or into the Highlands, he would learn of the serious effect that poaching and the prevalence of it has had on the tourist industry.

Mr. Kennedy: What does the Solicitor-General for Scotland think of the apparent complacency with which the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland accepts the fact that its own recently published figures show that 14 per cent. of Scottish salmon fishery owners in the country did not even bother to submit, as they were legally supposed to do, return forms for their catches? Is the hon. and learned Gentleman concerned about that illegality, to which the Department is turning a blind eye?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: One person who did make a return to the Department on that matter was the Duke of Argyll. However, if the proprietors of salmon fisheries are not making the appropriate returns, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that that is essentially a matter for my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay).

Dangerous Driving

47. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what is the average length of time which elapses between charges being made for dangerous driving and an appearance in court.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: This information is not readily available. Procurators fiscal take a serious view of cases of reckless driving and give them as much priority as their local circumstances permit.

Mr. Forsyth: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware of the distress being caused to relatives—especially in cases in which near relations have been involved in fatal accidents—by the considerable delays being experienced in my constituency?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I am aware of one case in my hon. Friend's constituency about which he is concerned and which he has discussed with me. However, I advise him that the case is now before the courts and, as it is sub-judice, I can say nothing further about it.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Solicitor-General for Scotland agree that it would be a good and sensible thing if those who are responsible for trying driving cases, especially dangerous driving cases, which involve objective, professional and technical judgment, at least had a driving qualification of some kind themselves?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Although in general I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, if that principle were applied broadly across the criminal law field only those who had committed fraud and who had an understanding of how to do so would decide and judge such cases. Generally speaking, we require people with some intelligence and some experience, but above all, we need to see that those who judge act fairly and without prejudice.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of questions?

Mr. Clarke: No.

Mr. Speaker: Later, please.

Mr. Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of questions.

I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, on question No. 7, which concerned the proposed merger between the Aberdeen and Dundee colleges of education. I came into questions specifically to raise a matter on that question which has direct relevance to my constituency. I should appreciate your help, Mr. Speaker, on the normal convention of the House. I have been led to believe that if a question is of direct relevance to a Member's constituency that Member will normally be called, especially in circumstances such as today, when I was the only representative——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is questioning my authority on that matter. I must advise him that I allowed a good run on that question and that I must balance both sides of the House, and all the parties in the House. The hon. Gentleman will find that a member of his own party was called to ask a question.

Television Licence Fees

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about decisions on certain parts of the Peacock report on broadcasting which the House debated on 20 November 1986.

We accept the judgment of the Peacock committee that the BBC should not be financed through advertising and that, for the time being, the licence fee should remain the principal source of income. As the House knows, we have commissioned an expert study of the technical and economic feasibility of subscription which, in principle, we find attractive. We should receive that in the spring, but it is, in any case, clear, as Professor Peacock noted, that that form of funding could not be introduced for some years.

I have already announced that the colour licence fee will remain at £58 until March 1988. We have decided that thereafter it should be indexed to move annually in line with the retail price index. That will provide secure and predictable funding for the BBC consistent with the principle of its constitutional independence. Increases in the licence fee will in future be determined on precisely the same basis as increases in pensions and benefits. As Peacock proposed, the new colour licence fee will be calculated on a notional licence fee for 1987-88 of £60. In April 1988 the fee will be increased by an amount which reflects the percentage annual change in the retail prices index as measured at October 1987. Given the past tendency of BBC costs to rise faster than inflation, this form of indexation will provide a strong incentive to practise efficiency and care in undertaking fresh commitments. The Government see the new arrangements I have announced today as lasting for at least three years from April 1988; any departure from them should be wholly exceptional and for clearly stated reasons.

We believe that people should have the option of receiving black and white television and taking out a significantly cheaper licence. Accordingly, despite Peacock's suggestion that the monochrome licence fee might be brought closer to that of the colour licence, we have decided that the monochrome fee should remain at broadly its present level. It will therefore be indexed on the basis I have described, starting from a notional base line of £20 and continuing to provide a cheaper alternative licence.

We have looked again at the arguments for concessionary licences. We are satisfied that there are overwhelming objections both on principle and on grounds of practicability to the Peacock committee's proposal that pensioners drawing supplementary pensions should be exempt from the licence fee if they live in households wholly dependent on a pension. We reject Peacock's suggestion which envisaged financing this proposal through a separate car radio licence. In the light of those decisions, we have decided to keep the existing arrangements for concessionary licences for those in residential care.

We accept in principle the Peacock committee's view that the BBC should be given a bigger role in collecting the licence fee. We have doubts about its specific proposal that the BBC should act as a managing agent, on a consultative basis, to the Home Office because we think that that might lead to a confusion of responsibilities. While the Government will clearly need to determine the level of the licence fee and any concessionary arrangements, we believe, subject to study of the detailed implications, that the BBC should become directly responsible for collecting this revenue and for enforcing the licence fee system. The BBC's board of governors accepts in principle the merits of this approach. We shall be exploring together the detailed implications so that we can propose later any necessary changes in the law.

We are anxious that those wanting a television licence should have available, and be fully aware of, convenient means of paying for it. Since the last settlement, the Home Office, in consultation with the BBC and the Post Office, has carried out a thorough review of existing methods and examined possible new methods of payment. As a result, both we and the BBC see attractions in arrangements under which licences could be issued on a pay-as-you-go basis—at present, as the House knows, the licence fee has to be paid in full in advance. We shall be considering further with the BBC how that could be put into practice. meanwhile, we intend to make the public better aware of the various schemes that already exist for payment. We aim to increase convenience of payment for the consumer; to help those in financial difficulty to spread the cost of the fee; to minimise enforcement and administration costs; to reduce the levels of evasion and late payment; and to enable the BBC to maximise its revenue while keeping the cost of the licence fee down.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): We note with satisfaction that the Government have abandoned any idea of imposing advertising on the BBC. However, on another aspect of his statement, the Home Secretary has been less precise and less forthright. He tells us that after March 1988 the licence increase will be on a notional base of £60. However, he does not spell out exactly what that means for licence holders. Does it mean that on 1 April 1988 the Government intend to put up the licence fee by £2 to £60 and, at the same time, add to that a cost of living increase of up to £3? Will the Home Secretary deny that if I am mistaken? If I am not mistaken, will the right hon. Gentleman admit that the Government are planning what they hope will be a post-election increase in the licence of £5 a year on 1 April next year? It is important that the country should know whether that is what the Government are planning.

What about pensioners? The Home Secretary has accepted the Peacock proposal for an indexed television licence based on a figure of £60. But one integral ingredient of that proposal was free television licences for pensioner households drawing supplementary benefit, yet the Home Secretary has meanly rejected that recommendation. He picks and chooses among the Peacock recommendations, accepting those that suit him and rejecting another that would help the poor.

The Labour party believes that the financing of the BBC should be re-examined in a way that seeks to address itself to the problem of the licence as a regressive poll tax. Meanwhile, the Labour party makes it absolutely clear and reaffirms its commitment to phase out the television licence for all pensioners. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] I am coming to that. We consider that public expenditure to be a far more socially compassionate use of public money than squandering £164 million of taxpayers' money on the selling off of British Gas.

Mr. Hurd: As regards the right hon. Gentleman's first question, in October 1987 the sums will be done to calculate the rise in the retail prices index between September 1986 and September 1987, in exactly the same way as happens for pensions and other benefits. From April 1988 that calculation will be applied in addition to the notional fee of £60. The amount of the increase will depend on the Government's continuing success in resisting the efforts of the Labour party to push up inflation.

I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman asked his question because it enables me to make it clear that by April 1988 the BBC will be spending at substantially above the level of the £60 licence fee. We shall be applying a double squeeze—a once-and-for-all squeeze, inasmuch as we have chosen a notional figure of £60 and not a higher figure, although the BBC will be spending at a higher figure, and a continuous squeeze inasmuch as we have chosen for the index the retail prices index and not the higher index that the BBC tended to favour, because its costs have been historically high. There will be a double squeeze—a once-and-for-all squeeze, and a continuous squeeze on the spending of the BBC in order to relieve the licence payer from excessive increases.

On the right hon. Gentleman's second point, I notice that, in an incoherent way, the Labour party is set on the path that he describes. The policy that he announces from the Front Bench is different from the policy that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) may have an opportunity to develop on Friday. Both are a deeply incompetent attempt at a bribe, as the debate on Friday will reveal. Once people have got over the immediate dazzle of the proposition, they will reach the same conclusion as the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), a former Prime Minister and Home Secretary—that it is not a sensible use of social security money that elderly well-to-do people should suddenly receive free television. That is not an adequate or sensible way of spending the limited resources available for social security. The right hon. Gentleman has totally failed to explain how the £230 million, or £330 million, would be found, and we look forward to further exploration of that rather important point.

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the vast majority of people who have considered this matter will welcome the Government's decision that there should be indexation on what I hope will be an interim basis until the problems relating to the introduction of subscription as a means of financing the BBC have been resolved? Will he also accept that the principle of indexation will provide the BBC with a certain income, will encourage efficiency and will, I hope, also encourage the BBC to work towards the resolution of the problems relating to subscription which will provide a long-term answer to the BBC's problems?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, and I agree with him. The form of indexation that we have chosen is intended to be a reasonable squeeze on the BBC's revenues and, therefore, a reasonable protection for the licence holder. When we see the report of the expert study in the spring we shall be able to judge more clearly the merits of an approach towards subscription as a substitute for the licence and, perhaps equally important, the pace at which it is reasonable to move in that direction.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): It would have been absurdly optimistic for the BBC to have expected more support or understanding from the Government, but the Home Secretary must realise that indexing the new licence fee to the retail prices index is unsatisfactory bearing in mind the cost of wages, which far outstrip the retail prices index. We welcome the fact that he has ignored the Peacock recommendations in respect of monochrome licences. We welcome the fact that that fee will be pegged and we hope that it will be pegged even below £20.

It is sensible to let the BBC bring in its own procedure for collecting the licence fee, but we hope that that will not inhibit the Home Secretary from finding, before that becomes a fact, new ways of establishing instalments and other simple devices for paying licence fees for people who cannot afford them.

Mr. Hurd: It will be interesting as the debate continues over the coming months to learn how much higher the licence fee which the Liberal and Labour parties would propose to the BBC would be than the one which we suggest on the basis of indexation. The hon. Gentleman, from his knowledge of these matters, which is substantial, understands the nature of the squeeze that we are proposing, but I ask him not to get entirely hooked on the idea that, simply because the costs of an institution, even a famous institution, have historically risen higher than the RPI, we should accept as God-given that such increases must continue.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision that the licence fee should remain the principal source of the BBC's income and what appears to be his sensible proposal for the indexation of that fee. However, will my right hon. Friend spell out in clear terms the cost of the Labour party's commitment that everybody of pensionable age should, apparently, be allowed a free television licence? It seems that that would be an enormous expense on those who pay the licence fee. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to spell out that cost?

Mr. Hurd: The cost of the official Labour programme, as repeated by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), would be £330 million. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), with uncharacteristic modesty, has a more limited programme which would knock £100 million off that figure. His proposal would be impractical to administer, but it would cost £230 million instead of £330 million. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has made it clear that additional taxation would not be available to finance this. He has also warned against proposing that it could be done by extra borrowing. Therefore, we are forced to conclude that these substantial sums would be found either by loading them on the other licence holders or by cutting the social security budget in other respects.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Early in his remarks the Home Secretary said that the Government viewed the proposal for subscription payment for BBC television as an attractive option in principle. However, would it not be nonsense to have two channels available on subsription while other channels were available free at the point of delivery and funded by

[Mr. Chris Smith]

advertising? Will he consider again the difficulties which would be attendant upon the introduction of subscription television?

Mr. Hurd: We shall have an opportunity to consider the advantages and disadvantages when we have the consultants' report, but the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) should not over-egg this argument. We think that there is a powerful attraction in supposing that, instead of the existing licence fee, which will look odder and odder as time goes on and more and more channels are available, there might be a different system whereby people can, as they do in other respects in their daily lives, pay for what they choose to receive and not everything else.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Am I right in assuming that the Labour Party proposals would mean that non-pensioners would be paying about £90 a year for their licence? Will the BBC be responsible for collecting the licence and will it be able to put the agency out to tender on competitive terms?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend's question is among the details that we are discussing with the BBC. At present, the collection is done by the Post Office and in the past, there have been all sorts of suggestions and criticisms of that arrangement. If we reach an agreement with the BBC on lines that I have discussed, I am sure that the BBC would wish to consider various possibilities including continuing the arrangement with the Post Office.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right on his first point. If it is suggested that the cost of the scheme—the bribe—should be loaded on the existing licence holders, it is likely that the increase would be that suggested by my hon. Friend. I suspect that what the Opposition have in mind is that this figure should get lost in the general mish-mash of their financial policies and that they will seek to avoid a definite answer as to how and at whose expense the money is to be found.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the Home Secretary telling Sid that the licence fee will go up by £5 next year? Why is he perpetuating a poll tax system whereby the Savoy hotel, charging £100 a night for a single bedroom, pays for only one licence fee for 15 television sets and Harrods pays only a small fee for exhibiting several hundered sets? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that 1 million people do not and cannot pay their television licences because they never see £58 in a lump sum? Why will not the right hon. Gentleman impleme... the considered proposals of the Peacock committee and bring relief to hard-up pensioners?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that the Peacock committee proposals, which are much more limited than those of the Labour party, would be administratively possible. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should abandon the licence fee principle, but his party is saying that we should continue with the licence fee principle — to which it seems much more devoted than myself — but that we should differentiate and give a special subsidy and free television to elderly people regardless of their means and regardless of the fact that a large number of people are substantially worse off than a high proportion of pensioners.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Although I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said and I entirely endorse his statement, will he give the House a little more information about pensioner incomes? Approximately one-third of pensioners live above the national income level. Would it be entirely fair if the licence fee was loaded on to all other existing licence fee payers, many of whom are one-parent families?

Mr. Hurd: I am sure that that would be unfair. The precise fact for which my hon. Friend is searching is that 35 per cent. of pensioners—rather more than one-third —are represented in the three upper-fifths of national income distribution. That makes absolute nonsense of the Opposition's approach.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Is this not yet another step in the Government's vendetta against the BBC and their intention of cutting down the BBC? Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that the costs of advanced broadcasting technology are inevitably bound to rise faster than the RPI and that the effects of his policy will be damaging — which is his intention — and deleterious to the work of the BBC?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman's first step should be to do something to educate his own and the Liberal Front Bench because they have been sniping in a populist way at the proposal for indexation on the ground that it will be too high. The hon. Gentleman knows that it will be a substantial squeeze and therefore a substantial protection for the licence holder.

I shall repeat what I have said. We should be very wary of assuming that past cost increases were justified or of seeing them as eternal. The hon. Gentleman knows the problem that the BBC has had with its costs. The other system also has a severe problem. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the BBC is now making strenuous efforts, under its present leadership, to reduce its costs, and its stand in relation to the electricians' strike is part of that.

I believe that the Government should encourage the BBC in that effort by making it clear that the money which is available is compatible only with a considerable squeeze on costs. Moreover, I do not believe that the BBC should hold the idea that it must automatically leap first into any new venture without regard to the cost because it is afraid that someone else may come up with that idea.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): When does my right hon. Friend intend to ensure that every television receiver sold in the United Kingdom carries a built-in encryption unit so that when the move comes, as it inevitably will do, to subscription television, that will be technically possible?

Mr. Hurd: I know of my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for subscription television. However, we shall wait for the consultants' report as we shall then be able to judge whether that Peacock recommendation should be carried into effect, and, if so, how and at what speed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Does the Secretary of State realise that rather ignobly, because we might have hoped for better from him, he has shown himself to be suffering from the Tebbit syndrome, which means, when in difficulties bash the BBC? He has just enunciated a formula for slow strangulation, because the costs of technology rise more rapidly than the retail prices index. If we are to avoid the slow contraction of services, an erosion of quality, and a slow electronic rigor mortis,

the right hon. Gentleman will have to find revenues to supplement the licence fee—such as a point of sale tax on video tape recorders—and will have to end the present regressive policy by freeing the licence fee for pensioners, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has proposed.

Mr. Hurd: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is contradicting his own Front Bench, because it says that the licence fee increase is too much whereas he says that it is too little. He is right, as his hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) was right, to say that what we propose amounts to a squeeze. However, it is a squeeze in support of what the BBC is now trying to do. Consequently, I am not criticising or bashing the BBC. It is now making a manful effort to get its costs under control and to bring itself into the modern world in that regard. We want to help the BBC in its efforts.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is there not something terribly anachronistic about a system which in the foreseeable future will mean that many hard-pressed old-age pensioners will be forced to pay a compulsory BBC levy when, in other circumstances, they could watch the two ITV channels for nothing and elect in due course to pay a subscription fee, if they so wished, to the BBC?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend has succinctly put the case for subscription and for the philosophy lying behind the main recommendation in the Peacock report. We believe that if that recommendation is to be persuasive and effective it needs more back-up than it receives in the report, and so we have asked the consultants for a further report. When we receive it in the spring, we shall be able to reopen the discussion.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that in refusing to make any concessions he has today demonstrated a cruel indifference to many of our elderly people? A large majority of them are on low incomes and they rely on the television as their sole form of entertainment and many use it, as Peacock stated in his report, as a link to the outside world. I have received many letters from constituents of Conservative Members on this subject and I should like to know whether it is true that all Ministers have been told to be in the House on Friday to vote down my Bill.

Mr. Hurd: What rubbish this is! In a way I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to develop his case and that we shall have an opportunity to refute it later this week. The Labour party has wholly failed to explain where the money to finance that concession or the more extravagant concessions sought by the Opposition Front Bench is to come from, and so we must assume that there will be competition with other social security payments.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and his hon. Friends must develop the case that this proposition should be top of the queue, as it is wholly unrelated to need and there are so many other demands on the social security budget at present. A large proportion of the concession will go untaxed to well-off members of the community. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will have to make the unmakeable case that the concession is a satisfactory priority for the social security budget.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on his measured and sensible approach to the Peacock report. Will he assure the House that he will put considerable umph behind the proposals for a feasible subscription system and that he will then bring positive proposals to the House? We must find an alternative to the ludicrous licence fee system, because the majority of people are fed up with paying such an enormous fee for a regular diet of old films, repeats, American soap and biased current affairs programmes.

Mr. Hurd: The licence fee system was perfectly natural when the BBC had a monopoly. It has been tolerable during the era of the duopoly in which we still live. Like my hon. Friend, I think that it is beginning to creak quite noisily as we move into a time of possible wider choice. But before we abandon the system we must be clear that there is an alternative that makes sense. We may have found one, but it is still too soon to be absolutely clear. I take note of the point made by several of my hon. Friends that the House will wish to discuss that point again when the consultants report is published.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not fair to say that a Government who refuse even properly to heat the homes of millions of pensioners is hardly the sort of Government that would be receptive to the principle of free television licences for pensioners? When the Minister tells us that the Government do not have the money to do that, will he give us an assurance that there will be no tax cuts in the Budget which is due in two months time? Will he assure us that there will be no cuts in the standard rate of income tax, in the capital transfer tax or in capital gains tax? That is where the money is. The Minister knows that he has it, but he refuses to use it to help Britain's pensioners. He should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Hurd: I refuse to accept that it makes sense in terms of social security benefits for the old and those in need to put at the top of the queue and establish as a priority the giving of free television to elderly people, regardless of their circumstances and need. That is nonsense and it will be rapidly seen as such as the debate proceeds.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the income from the licence fee is about £1,000 million a year? Does he recognise that there is considerable disquiet, and not only on this side of the House, that such a large sum of money that is acquired by compulsion can be disbursed by an organisation that is virtually unaccountable except when it is brought to account through the courts? Why should the BBC uniquely have a secure and predictable income that is not enjoyed by the independent broadcasting companies?

Will my right hon. Friend also confirm that the sale of programmes contributes little more than 1 per cent. of the BBC's total income? If the BBC wishes to increase its resources and it is as good as it says it is, why does it not sell more programmes?

Mr. Hurd: I am entirely in favour of the BBC trying to improve and diversify its sources of income in the way my hon. Friend has suggested. He is unpicking the BBC's charter, as several of my hon. Friends would wish to do, and the form of responsibility that exists between the BBC and the House. The time will come—although it is not immediate—when the charter must be renewed and those matters will come up for discussion. We are concerned more immediately with the basis of financing the BBC and whether it is possible to move from the

[Mr. Hurd]

licence fee system, with all the criticisms made of it, towards a system of subscription based on individual choice.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Home Secretary aware that by rejecting all concessions he has, in effect, said that after the general election pensioners, among others, will pay £5 a year more for the licence? Does he really believe that people think that commercial television costs them nothing when the consumers, many of whom are pensioners, pay for it and when all advertising budgets are tax deductible and therefore the taxpayers, many of whom are pensioners, pay for it? The Home Secretary's statement is an attack upon the group that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) intends to protect.

Mr. Hurd: The only thing to be said for the hon. Member for Walsall, North is that he has never held office in a Government.

Having looked at the concessionary system and the proposals for improving it, I have come to exactly the same conclusion as the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues did when they were in office.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that my mother and my mother-in-law, of whom I am inordinately fond, would very much enjoy a free television licence, but is it not nonsense to subsidise people by age group alone? Is not the proper use of public money to use it where it will do most good? To subsidise those who do not need it deprives people who need state and taxpayers' help.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I agree with his premise and his conclusion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Home Secretary aware that he has not paid any attention to the argument put forward on this issue, that there are countless hundreds of thousands of pensioners who live in warden-controlled accommodation and who get a relatively free television licence?

The Labour party and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) will try on Friday to bring about some equality under the law so that every pensioner is treated properly. One thing is certain from the Home Secretary's remarks today. Hugo Young just about got it right in respect of the chairman of the Tory party. What he got wrong was that he did not apply it to the entire Government Front Bench, including himself.

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that anyone is entirely happy with the existing concessionary scheme that was introduced by the last Labour Government and which we have expanded by bringing in, in 1984, handicapped and disabled people.

As with winter heating, although on a lesser scale, we have taken what we inherited and made it somewhat more substantial. However one expands this housing-based concession, there will be borderline cases and difficulties. We have considered the matter carefully, but we have concluded that the best way is to continue with the present limited concession.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have looked at various proposals for the financing and control of the BBC. I think that it has been suggested that there should be established a Ministry of arts and media, hence to be known as the Ministry of Culture and Propaganda. Originally that would be without the BBC, but knowing the nature of the proposals of such a Ministry inevitably the BBC would come within its ambit. Could my right hon. Friend tell the House, and particularly the Labour party, why that would not be an appropriate solution?

Mr. Hurd: I have noticed that there has been commotion in the shadow kingdom on this subject and I had mixed feelings when I read today that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) had unhorsed the challenger who was attempting to take away part of his shadow fief. It is a shadowy business, as my hon. Friend would acknowledge.

For what it is worth, it is on the whole better, regardless naturally of all personalities, that the Shadow Home Office fief should resemble the accurate one as represented by the Home Secretary.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the Home Secretary aware that Britain's 10 million pensioners will view this week in Westminster with a slight degree of incredulity? Yesterday, paid for through a cut in the real value of their pension, the Government said: "Here is a fiver." That is wholly inadequate to pay towards the heating of their homes. Today they are saying, "An extra fiver will go on your television licence?" Yesterday the pensioners were told that it was a choice between food and fuel. Today it will be a choice between food and entertainment. Is that really the future that the Tory Government offer Britain's 10 million pensioners?

Mr. Hurd: Pensioners are not so simple or silly as the hon. Member appears to make out. They know that in the lifetime of this Government there has been a 25 per cent. increase in real terms in spending on pensions. They will know from their experience how to weigh in the balance the sort of shallow half promises being tossed about by the Labour party.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): As the BBC easily won the ratings war over the Christmas period, with eight programmes in the top 10, will my right hon. Friend accept that he is quite right to resist claims that funding of the BBC be at parity with ITV, as such extra funding is totally superfluous?

Mr. Hurd: I think that, on the whole, my hon. Friend commends the balance that we have tried to strike. If that is what he is doing, I agree with him.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Home Secretary appeared to reject the idea that concessions should be given to pensioners. Will he confirm that the present concessionary system will be maintained? If he does, will he accept that, in those areas in which local authorities have a splendid record in building and providing accommodation for the elderly, the grievous anomalies are particularly intense? Will the right hon. Gentleman make sure that the point that he made to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is properly sustained? He said that my hon. Friends wil have to deploy arguments to convince the Government about the merits of the Bill on Friday. Have not the Government already made up their mind regardless of the case that my hon. Friends will make?

Mr. Hurd: I will welcome the debate because it will show the hollowness of the pretensions of Opposition Members. The hon. Gentleman's first point is entirely right. The present concessionary scheme that we inherited and, as I have said, expanded to include the handicapped and disabled is patchy. It produces anomalies that are particularly severe in some parts of the country. We have tried hard to find a neater, tidier way of spending roughly the same amount—£22 million. We have not found a neater way to avoid creating new anomalies. Therefore, I confirm that we have decided to maintain the present scheme.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said. I am sorry that the Government have rejected advertising as such out of hand. There is advertising every day on the BBC. Every sporting organisation that is sponsored by a commercial organisation receives money not because of philanthropy but because the commercial organisation wishes to advertise as widely as possible to the widest audience. There is no mechanical reason why this could not be done in the same way as money is collected for the Performing Right Society.

Mr. Hurd: Evidently, the BBC draws a distinction between advertising and sponsorship. As my hon. Friend may know, it is exploring and putting forward ideas for a limited range of sponsorship. The BBC has been in touch with us about that matter. It is its initiative. We shall be interested to see how its thinking develops on this matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Gentlemen who have been standing. I ask for questions on this statement and not the speeches that might be made tomorrow.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Does the Home Secretary think that the public wish to see a reducing proportion of national income available to the BBC?

Mr. Hurd: So long as the licence fee system continues, the public will welcome a system that provides the BBC with an income that will rise in the same way, to the same extent and on the same dates as pensions and social security benefits. They will find that a much more reasonable proposition than others to which they may have to listen.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that his statement puts the BBC in a uniquely privileged position? Not only does it have a guaranteed income but it is protected against inflation, regardless of its ability to satisfy consumers. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the necessary changes in the structure of the BBC will be made to ensure that it is able to meet its obligations under the charter and thereby do something in return for this privilege?

Mr. Hurd: I assure my hon. Friend that the BBC will not regard today's announcement in anything like the same way as he does. The BBC clearly will see, as various questions have illustrated, the substantial double squeeze on its income—first, the once-for-all choice of the base line, and, secondly, the RPI indexation as opposed to indexation of relative costs, as Mr. Samuel Brittan and others rather surprisingly suggested. The squeeze is intended to support and underpin the efforts that my hon. Friend and I strongly welcome being made by the BBC to bring its costs under effective control.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Was the Home Secretary being any more than polite to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) when he agreed with what he said and, in particular, rather threateningly said that the BBC was creaking? I remind the right hon. Gentleman of a cautionary little tale. When the late Reggie Bevins was Postmaster-General, in answer to questions he said he would do something about the BBC and "That Was The Week That Was". Reggie Bevins, when he went to his desk the following morning, found a little note on it. The little note said, "Oh no, you won't." It was signed "Harold."

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is uncharacteristically inaccurate. It was not the BBC but the licence fee system for financing it, which I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley), seemed to be beginning to creak.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Will my right hon. Friend accept that today's announcement will be seen outside as a victory for the BBC and, therefore, is most disappointing? Does he agree that the House seriously hoped that the licence fee would have been reduced rather than linked to an inflation increase and that the remainder would have been made up by advertising? Does he agree that the pay-as-you-view system is unlikely to succeed at the moment anyway because, as hon. Members have said before, there have been so many repeats? Please, may we reconsider this and again examine advertising?

Mr. Hurd: If my hon. Friend believes that that is how this announcement will be regarded by the BBC or others, he will believe anything. On the whole, the debate on 20 November supported the Peacock conclusion on advertising. There was hardly a whisper in the whole of the debate criticising that particular Peacock recommendation which, as I said, on examination the Government found to be cogent.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): How can a Government, who have cut the real value of the pension by £8 a week since they came to office, while handing out £3·6 billion to the richest 5 per cent. in the country, refuse 14,000 pensioners in my constituency, most of whom are poor, some concession on their television licence fee? The Government must bear in mind that those pensioners are fully aware that many of the right hon. Gentleman's rich friends who permanently reside in luxury hotels and west end clubs get their television viewing free all the year round.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman may know that I tightened up the rules about hotels and television licences when I was Minister of State because I thought it was needed. The hon. Gentleman will not succeed in persuading his elderly constituents that the right way to spend £230 million, or £330 million, of social security money is to give free television licences to elderly dowagers and elderly people across the country regardless of need.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): As questions on the statement draw to a close, will the Home Secretary make it clear to the House whether he intends to organise opposition to the Bill to be presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on Friday?

Mr. Hurd: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Kaufman: Have not two clear facts emerged from the Home Secretary's attempt to create a smoke screen this afternoon? First, the Government are planning a £5 licence increase for all television viewers on 1 April next year. Secondly, the Government oppose the Labour policy of phasing out television licences for all pensioners. The Labour party will be happy for the country to choose between those two policies.

Mr. Hurd: It has emerged clearly in this agreeable prelude to Friday's debate that some Opposition Members think that we are squeezing the BBC intolerably. Other hon. Members believe that we are giving far too much to the BBC and that an increase based on indexation is too generous. What we have set forward will appear to be sensible to sensible people—that while the licence system continues, the BBC, rather than having the occasional arbitrary increase that occurred in the past, should have a system of indexation that will provide a once-for-all squeeze when it is introduced in 1988, and then a continuing squeeze on costs that will show the direction in which it should go.

Guinness plc

4.9 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that some weeks ago I endeavoured to draw the attention of the House to the number of job losses in my constituency arising from the Guinness takeover. I seek your guidance principally because in today's issue of *The Independent* there are two articles, the first of which is headed, "£200m Guinness slush fund" and the second:

"Guinness's second secret Boesky link".

—*[Interruption.]* With great respect, the House is aware that you, Mr. Speaker, not individual Members, rule whether a matter is in order.

These important articles tell us that a Department of Trade and Industry inquiry is being undertaken at present, but no formal indication of that matter has been given to the House. The House knows how well you seek to protect our interests. How can an hon. Member find out from the Department of Trade and Industry precisely what is taking place about job losses and broken promises, and how we can bring these matters into the public domain?

I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for listening to what I have had to say. I seek your advice most sincerely on how this most important matter can be pursued.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to the fact that today the board of Guinness received a full report on the Department of Trade and Industry's inquiry? We understand that tomorrow the shareholders are to receive a special statement on the inquiry. We read that the Prime Minister has already received a private presentation of the report of the inquiry. The only interested body which, apparently, is not to be favoured with a statement is Parliament. May I urge you to reflect overnight whether Parliament can continue to command respect if it is not given the opportunity to consider a matter of daily press comment which relates to the biggest city scandal for generations and involves a slush fund which is big enough to enable us to double the fuel payments proposed by the Government?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is some difficulty in raising this matter in the House for two reasons which you should bear in mind, especially as we can discuss most issues properly. First, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is unable to speak on this issue because of the close association of his family with the whole affair. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] That causes other difficulties. As the investigation has been set up in such a way that it will continue beyond the general election, we are unable to discuss the matter even with junior Ministers. How can you assist the House to enable the matter to be discussed?

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the matter had the urgency and importance claimed by the Opposition, would you not allow them to change yet again the subject for today's debate so that they could raise this matter properly? Would you allow them to do that if they asked?

Mr. Speaker: The proper way to deal with the matter is to table questions to the Department. That is what hon. Members should do.

Members' Correspondence

4.23 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have received many letters regarding my Bill on Friday, some of which have been dealt with by my secretary and some by the Library. This is part of the support campaign by the *Daily Star*.—*[Laughter.]* Tory Members' constituents who write to me do not consider it to be a laughing matter.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. What has this to do with me?

Mr. Winnick: I am asking you, Sir, whether there is any arrangement—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentlemen would shut up for a moment, I could continue. Are there any arrangements whereby authorities in the House could ensure that the increasing number of letters that have been sent to me instead of to the hon. Member concerned could be distributed accordingly by Friday?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot think that that falls anywhere within my responsibilities.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Ordered,

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (No. 10) Order 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 2248) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Late Payment of Debts

4.24 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a legally enforceable system of penalties on late payment of debts.

The problems created by the late payments of debts, particularly to small firms and the self-employed, are widely agreed by hon. Members and business organisations outside the House to be widespread and serious. The House will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) introduced on 8 April 1986 a ten-minute Bill on the right to interest, which has been reintroduced this Session. My hon. Friend has worked tirelessly to highlight the need for action on this problem; for example, the debate that he initiated on 24 July and early-day motion 63, which has been signed by more than 100 hon. Members on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend also took part in a press conference on 18 November at which the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), representing the Labour party, and for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth), representing the SDP, spoke about the problem.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment has done an immense amount of work on the problem since he took office. Last year he introduced a code of practice entitled "Payment on time", and I congratulate him on that. It shows his and the Government's concern. Nevertheless, the problem of the voluntary code is self-evident: it has no teeth to ensure universal compliance. My case is that there needs to be legislative change to support the code.

Obviously, the law differs in some respects north and south of the border. But it is astonishing that despite a Law Commission report in 1978, recommending that contract debts should carry a statutory right to interest save where parties otherwise agree, the La Pintada case confirmed that under the Administration of Justice Act 1982 interest does not run before proceedings for recovery of the principal sum have begun.

My hon. Friend's Bill would establish a legally enforceable right to interest on late payment of debts. I would add to that, first, the need to ensure that the Scottish position is fully covered. Secondly, I would propose to limit the new rights of interest to individuals, partnerships and private limited companies. That would answer the Government's criticism that legislation might be used by large companies to the detriment of small companies and the self-employed. Thirdly, the long title of my Bill is sufficiently wide to enable the Government to introduce supplementary proposals in Committee, if they wish.

The problem is certainly widespread. In a survey in November, the Forum of Private Business suggested that Britain's small businesses were owed an estimated £57 billion—£5 billion in Scotland. The problems that result are not only those of cash flow, which inhibits growth, investment and job creation. The problems can create serious personal strain. The Confederation of British Industry (Scotland) recently described the practice as amounting

"to pernicious and dishonest trading."

A CBI survey in November 1985 showed that 81 per cent. of firms replying said that late payment problems were a

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

general burden in terms of the extra costs incurred and management time wasted, and that 11 per cent. suffered serious set-backs attributable to late payments.

Hon. Members will have cases from their own constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) told me of some earlier today. In my constituency a small firm came to see me last week with a problem so severe that it had gone to a debt collector. That has not helped, so now it must sue the debt collector. A business man told me that more than 50 per cent. of his time must be devoted to this problem. In Renfrewshire, Rathoprint closed because big firms would not pay in time.

The problem is becoming worse. Sixty-one per cent. of the CBI survey believed that standards had declined over the past 10 years, and only 8 per cent. believed that they had improved. A Forum of Private Business survey of members' opinions shows that an increasing number are in favour of legislation, now 84 per cent. The commercial collection division of Dun and Bradstreet, the United Kingdom's largest debt collector—and it ought to know what it is talking about — claims that the code of practice is not reducing the problem and that the situation has worsened since the code was introduced last May.

From 1 October last year, the Customs and Excise authorities have been empowered to impose statutory penalties on businesses late in paying VAT, and the penalties range from 5 per cent. to as much as 30 per cent. This puts an additional squeeze on small firms, and it is regrettable that no action has yet been taken to help them with their problems. The effects of what is proposed would not resolve all the problems, but it would be a further step in the right direction.

The Scottish secretary of the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses has said that the Bill would not be a complete solution, but statutory powers would tilt the balance of the dilemma in favour of small businesses. I know that until now my hon. Friend has taken the view that we should wait for two or three years to see whether the voluntary code works, despite the evidence already that it does not.

The threat of a possible application for interest would be enough to change debtors' behaviour, especially if a few well-publicised test cases followed a change in the law. Most other countries, with the notable exception of the Republic of Ireland, have legislation to help with this problem. I commend to my hon. Friend the legislation in Germany and in Japan. This measure would significantly help hundreds of thousands of small firms and self-employed people. We need to change the balance in favour of the honest small business man, so that he can go ahead and expand and prosper in the sure knowledge that he has a greater chance of getting what he is owed in a reasonable time. I hope that the House will accept the Bill and give it a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. Richard Ottaway, Mrs. Anna McCurley, Sir Hector Monro, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. John Corrie, Mr. Geoffrey Dickens, Mr. Michael Forsyth, Mr. Michael Grylls, Mr. Robert Jones, Mr. Albert McQuarrie and Mr. Bill Walker.

Late Payment of Debts

Mr. Allan Stewart accordingly presented a Bill to establish a legally enforceable system of penalties on late payment of debts; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 3 April and to be printed. [Bill 44].

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Severe Weather Payments

4.32 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, recognising that the Government deliberately chose such a low threshold as −1·5° Centigrade for the Exceptionally Severe Weather Payments Scheme so as to ensure that help is difficult to obtain and insecure in provision, and noting that as a result of the break in the uprating with earnings, single pensioners are today £8 per week worse off and married couple £12 per week worse off than under Labour's formula, calls upon the Government to pay £5 per week automatically as of right to all the poorest and most needy pensioners and families with small children as the only way to guarantee that they receive the necessary heating when they need it without fear of debt.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Meacher: A month ago the Opposition launched a debate demonstrating that the Government's proposals for exceptionally severe weather payments were a cruel farce because the scheme had been rigged in such a way that hardly a pensioner would get a penny. We pressed the Government to improve the scheme before it was introduced on 12 December, but the Government took no notice. We then held another debate a week before Christmas to urge the Government to reconsider. Again the Government took no notice.

Last week was bitterly cold and culminated in the coldest night for a quarter of a century. If there was ever a need for exceptionally severe weather payments it was demonstrated last week. Precisely one area in the entire country, one area out of the 64 weather station areas into which Britain is divided, triggered the minus 1·5 deg. C threshold. That area, Eskdalemuir, is a sparsely populated area in south-west Scotland where there are probably more sheep than people. It was obvious that the scheme had fallen at the first hurdle yet two days ago faced with irrefutable evidence of the scheme's pathetic inadequacy, the Minister blithely insisted that the new system had to be given a try.

Precisely one day later, yesterday, the Prime Minister denounced the scheme as a bureaucratic procedure as though her Government had not introduced it in the first place. The Minister made a statement confessing that it did not matter about the temperature readings and that he would pay all the pensioners in the qualifying categories.

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth".

We want to know whether the Government are genuinely repenting or whether this is a convenient one-off concession brought about, not by the temperature outside, but by the political temperature inside. This change of mind on the part of the Government was taken at the last possible moment yesterday and was clearly prompted by an anxiety to save the Government's face in the debate today. Perhaps we ought to have a debate on this subject every week in order to jog the Government's conscience.

We want to know whether the Government are discarding this miserable little scheme altogether and replacing it with a payment as of right throughout the winter to all the poorest and most needy pensioners. That is what we have proposed all along. The Minister had better understand at the outset that there is little rhyme or reason in a one-week concession. Why not last week, and what about next week?

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will not give way now. I shall give way in a moment. What is the point of disregarding a bureaucratic procedure one week if one immediately returns to it the next week?

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Does the £3·6 billion poverty programme that the Labour party is supposed to have agreed at its recent Bishops Stortford meeting include provision for £5 a week for the duration of the winter? That adds up to about £180 million. If it does not include that amount, where will the money come from?

Mr. Meacher: I can tell the hon. Gentleman one place that it could come from. I do not know whether he has had notice of some of the contents of the public expenditure White Paper, but I see that the Government are proposing to spend an extra £230 million in the next two years on the cost of stocking Common Market food mountains. I suggest that that money would be much better spent on elderly people in the cold. *[Interruption.]*

A single one-off £5 payment is not exactly generous in present conditions. It is about enough to heat one room for two days using a two-bar electric fire. What about the other five days of the week? I can tell the Minister that running a two-bar fire for 24 hours a day costs about £18 a week at current prices. I suspect that many pensioners need to spend an extra £10 to £15 a week to keep warm in the current freeze. That is why the cumulative effect of successive £5 payments every week which we recommend is so important. A one-off payment, like the one that the Government have just announced, does not lift any of the anxiety of elderly people who turn off the heating for fear of running into debt because of the uncertainty of future payments.

Mr. Maples: Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House how much the last Labour Government spent on exceptionally severe weather payments?

Mr. Meacher: I certainly will, and I give advance notice of a later section of my speech. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that on the electricity discount scheme we spent nine times more than this Government are spending on the exceptionally severe weather payments scheme.

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. John Major): Since the hon. Gentleman has made that interesting and freshly discovered observation, would he care to put it into its proper context by reminding the House of the level of inflation in electricity prices at that time?

Mr. Meacher: Perhaps the Minister — [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am answering. What matters to elderly people is the increase in the value of their pension, in real terms, after inflation is taken into account. On that basis, under the last Labour Government the value of the pension increased by 20 per cent. in real terms. Under this Government, it has increased by 3 per cent. in seven years.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I do not intend to give way again. I want to get on with my speech.

Nor are the qualifying categories for this single one-off payment anywhere near wide enough. They are confined to pensioners on supplementary benefit. There are a million or so pensioners with incomes that are only slightly above the supplementary benefit line who are just as much in need because they are struggling to pay their fuel bills. We would include them in the regular weekly payment of a £5 special winter fuel premium.

Mr. Hayes *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: The Government have not included them even in the single one-off payment that they have conceded for one week. That is the difference.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way once more.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman speaks loftily of the earnings-related formula, which is an integral part of the Opposition's motion. However, does he remember that his Government abandoned that formula in 1976, 1977 and 1978 and that in 1979 the then Secretary of State for Social Services—now Lord Ennals—in Pensioners Voice, said that he did not have to take it into account, anyway?

Mr. Meacher: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will convince any pensioners by producing statistical distortions of that kind. What matters to pensioners is the value of the money in their pockets and its purchasing power. Under a Labour Government, it rose by a fifth, but under this Government it has been virtually stationary for seven years. However, that is not the real issue. The real issue is that this scheme is hopelessly inadequate. It must be replaced as a matter of urgency if thousands of preventable deaths are not to occur this winter.

The scheme has three fundamental defects. The trigger threshold at minus 1·5 deg C is absurdly low. Even when that temperature is reached, nearly always it does not trigger payment because of the absurd seven-day averaging requirement from Monday to Sunday, which is so bureaucratically cumbersome. Pensioners cannot receive the payment, anyway, if they have more than £500 in the bank. The Minister knows, I hope, that most pensioners save for their funerals. Today a funeral costs more than £500. Under this scheme, money reserved for one's funeral makes it more likely that one will not get help to stay alive. That is hardly a sensible way to run a scheme.

If the scheme had been in operation last winter—which was the bitterest for 40 years—more than half the country would still not have triggered payment for one week throughout the entire winter. What is so cynical about this exercise is that the Government chose the minus 1·5 deg C threshold not on the grounds of health or need but as a temperature level that would ensure that about only one in eight pensioners qualified for a single £5 payment once every five years. That is why the scheme is virtually useless, and it was intended to be useless.

I invite hon. Members to look at the evidence. Last week temperatures reached minus 17 deg C at Aviemore, minus 12 deg C at Shrewsbury, minus 16 deg C around the Pennines and minus 7 deg C in London, yet in not one of those areas did pensioners get a penny. After the worst January weather on record and the coldest night for 26 years, 99·9 per cent. of pensioners were still excluded from payment. At Aberdeen, Arbroath, Dumfries and Dundee the temperature fell below minus 1·5 deg C for three of the seven days last week, Monday to Sunday, yet pensioners and families with babies got nothing. At Colchester, Clacton, Ipswich and King's Lynn in East Anglia and at Glasgow, Coatbridge, Paisley, Dumbarton and Inverness in Scotland the temperature fell below minus 1·5 deg C for four of the seven days last week, yet pensioners and families with babies got nothing. In Edinburgh, the temperature fell below minus 1·5 deg C for five of the seven days last week, yet pensioners and families with babies got nothing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. Fourteen weather stations registered an average weekly temperature below freezing. Last week the highest weekly temperature in the whole of Britain was only 3·6 deg C. That was in the west country. Almost everywhere the temperature was virtually at freezing point, yet throughout the country only a handful of pensioners received the payment. That is not fine tuning. That is callous neglect.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): If the Government's purpose in fashioning this scheme were to avoid making any payments to those who the hon. Gentleman says are in need, they have not been very successful, have they? Why is it that in the first year after the introduction of this scheme we find that we are paying out under it?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. The point is that it was needed last week, but virtually nobody got it. The Government are so utterly embarrassed and ashamed of the fact that in the worst cold weather for 30 or 40 years nobody received the payment that they have decided to scrap the scheme, but only for one week, so that they will have something to say in this debate. Their action is as callous as that.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): When the Labour Government were in office is it not a fact that when the weather was nowhere as cold as this we gave a 25 per cent. discount on winter electricity bills to all pensioners and that we sold gas at cost price, which was a very much cheaper price than it is now, because of the profit margin that has been added to it?

Mr. Meacher: That is right, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) also ended disconnections in the winter of 1977 and, I believe, in 1978 for all pensioners. That was extremely important because it removed fear and did not lead people to turn off their heating when they most needed it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point.

It is also very disturbing that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and I have had the greatest difficulty in obtaining information about temperatures. I put down a parliamentary question for answer yesterday, asking for the average weekly temperatures last week in all 64 areas of the country. I was not given the answer yesterday but was told in the evening, by the press office I might say, that the answer said that the information could not be given. I have now found out why. The Meteorological Office would not give the information on temperatures because it is run by, of all organisations, the Ministry of Defence. I have also since discovered that a circular has been issued forbidding

officials from giving any information that might be contentious, and apparently day and night temperatures come into that category.

We seem to have reached a point where the Soviet Union is more open about riots in Kazakhstan and about nuclear explosions at Chernobyl than are the British Government about temperatures in Britain. I would have thought that even a Government that abused the whole concept of national security over the Peter Wright memoirs could scarcely pretend that revealing daily temperatures endangered the safety of the realm. So I put the Minister on notice that the House expects and has a right to have weekly temperature readings in each of the 64 areas of the country, and the Ministry of Defence had better be told that now.

Not only have the Government suppressed relevant information, they have also been active in an orgy of misinformation. The Prime Minister rested her case yesterday on the claim that £400 million more was being spent on heating allowances and that at least severe weather payments are being made, which was not the case under the Labour Government. What she did not say was that Labour did not need to do that because increases in the pension were so much higher under Labour. If the Tory Government had not broken Labour's uprating link with earnings—and this is of crucial importance—the pension for a single person would now be £7·20 a week higher, every week of this year, and that for a married couple would be £11·40 a week higher, every week of this year. If we had pensions at that level today, we could simply dispense with this piffling farce of a scheme, and guarantee that pensioners had the necessary income to keep warm.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has just stated that the Labour Government implemented pensions in a particular way. The hon. Gentleman is aware that that simply is not correct.

Several Hon. Members: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that hon. Members will leave it to the Chair to rule on points of order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Meacher: Another thing that the Prime Minister did not say was that while her Government have increased heating allowances by £400 million—about £140 million in real terms—which I welcome, they have also, by breaking the uprating link with earnings, cut over £3,000 million from pensioners' incomes. For every £1 which pensioners have gained from higher heating allowances and exceptionally severe weather payments, they have lost £8 from the cut in the pension under this Government.

There is another thing, too, that the Prime Minister somehow did not quite manage to remember yesterday. Two years ago her Government knocked £1 a week—that is £50 a year—off the supplementary benefit of pensioners with heating allowances—not exactly the kind of policy that we would expect from someone who really cared about pensioners in the cold.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: The Prime Minister also said yesterday, in what I must say was the most selective misquotation of the political record that I have heard for a long time in the House, that Labour did not have a cold weather payments scheme. Quite apart from the much higher pensions that we paid, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) has already made clear——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Pensions have increased under this Government, mathematical illiterate. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that he cannot intervene in that fashion and must not seek to do so.

Mr. Meacher: I suggest that the hon. Member for the "Hollering Tendency" listens for a bit. He might learn something about the true situation.

The Labour Government did provide a top-up scheme, and it was a much more generous one than this miserly exceptionally severe weather payments scheme. Under the electricity discount scheme, introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, £5 was paid automatically to all persons on supplementary benefit and family income supplement, plus 25 per cent. of the cost of the winter electricity bill in excess of £20. The Labour Government devoted £45 million to that scheme. The Tory Government are spending about £5 million.

Mr. Forsyth *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: Under our scheme 4·5 million people were eligible; under this Tory scheme fewer than 2 million people are eligible, so let us have no more of the lies and claptrap about Labour, which are specifically designed to divert attention from the central fact that, according to Age Concern, 100 old people are dying in this country at this time every week.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I will not give way.

Unless the Government go a lot further than the tiny concession forced out of them yesterday, I fear that we are on the brink of an even bigger disaster than last year. Last year 1,060 elderly people died of hypothermia and another 40,000 died of bronchial pneumonia, heart attacks and strokes brought on by the extreme cold. There is nothing inevitable about this roll-call of tragic deaths. They are preventable. In Canada, in Sweden, in France, the winters are much colder than they are here normally, yet hardly any old people die of hypothermia. That is because in those countries the houses are much better insulated and pension levels are much higher, perhaps almost unbelievably to many hon. Members—and even more unbelievably to many pensioners in Britain—three times higher in Germany and France, in relation to average earnings, so pensioners can afford the fuel to keep them warm. That is why we now press the Govermment as a matter of urgency——

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he at this stage in his argument concede that the worst year in the last decade for deaths from hypothermia was the winter of 1978-79? He will concede that fact, I hope.

Mr. Meacher: It is perfectly true that the number of deaths from hypothermia has been in the region of 50 and has stayed at much the same level throughout the past 10 or 20-year period, but I will say this to the Secretary of

[Mr. Meacher]

State. If this scheme is not changed by the Government tonight or in the very near future, more people will die of hypothermia this year than in 1978-79.

I want to press the Government to adopt a three-point programme. First, they should announce today that they are dropping the exceptionally severe weather payments scheme, in acknowledgement of the fraud that it is, and replacing it not just for one week but for every week this winter with a £5 payment, not only to all the 1·75 million pensioners on supplementary benefit but to the 1 million or so on the margins of poverty, just above the supplementary benefit line. That is the only way for pensioners to be certain that they will receive payment and not be frightened into turning off or turning down the heat for fear that they will not have the money to pay for it.

The Government should do something else to provide immediate relief in these exceptionally severe conditions. There are estimated to be between 25,000 and 40,000 people homeless and sleeping rough in London at this time. The London Labour boroughs have been opening night shelters as best they can. Young people are also being turned out of lodgings into the snow because of the Government's iniquitous board and lodging regulations. The Government should today instruct London Transport to open the tube stations at the Bank, Monument and Charing Cross to provide night shelter and protection from the bitter cold for the homeless. I am advised that those stations are best equipped for such an emergency, because they cover the worst areas, have the most space and facilities and using them would cause the least disruption. Will the Secretary of State, as a matter of priority, in conjunction with the London Labour boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Islington and Camden, make available the facilities of the civil defence bunkers at Clapham Common, Clapham North, Clapham South and Stockwell underground stations for the immediate shelter of the homeless in inner city London? We regard immediate action as a litmus test of the Government's commitment at this time.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I want to conclude.

I wish to refer to one other urgent matter. At present, the London borough of Greenwich is absolutely snowbound. At 9 am this morning, 100 soliders from the Royal Artillery, Woolwich, started to assist. They are using their four-wheel drive vehicles to deliver meals on wheels to the elderly and doing such vital work as getting home helps to elderly people and digging out elderly people from snowbound homes to take them to day centres to warm them up. At lunchtime today, the Ministry of Defence instructed the Army to cease all such help at 12 midnight. The borough needs to re-apply for assistance. If this is general Government policy, it is placing a bureaucratic block in the way of commonsense help which is urgently needed in this crisis. I hope very much that the Minister will give a commitment that this will not happen again. *[Interruption.]* This is not just about London. What happens in——

Mr. MacKay *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) must not persist in that fashion. It is clear that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is not giving way.

Mr. Meacher: May I say to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) that what happens in London can happen elsewhere if the Government so wish. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be more concerned about what we are proposing in London because there are many Scottish young people homeless and in need of assistance in the Metropolis.

Secondly, there is a desperate need to improve insulation and draught-proofing, starting with the homes of the most vulnerable elderly people. Research has shown that a badly insulated home costs 12 times as much to heat for every 1 deg. C drop in temperature as a well-insulated home. Britain has probably the worst insulated homes in western Europe, and the biggest sufferers are probably the elderly. At present, the insulation programme is, to say the least, fragmentary. Worse still, for the elderly, it will come to an absolute halt in a year's time when the Fowler Social Security Act halts the single payments for this purpose in April 1988.

As for the immediate crisis, the Child Poverty Action Group, Help the Aged, and four other major groups wrote to the Minister in October, I understand, pointing out the huge problems if there was a sudden drop in temperature and offering their help and experience. They received an acknowledgement and have heard nothing else since.

For several years, the Opposition have been pressing for a national insulation scheme. It would provide jobs —since, of course, it is highly labour-intensive—save energy and protect old people from the extreme cold. We believe that some priority insulation work could still be done this winter, but at least the Government should now give a commitment that throughout this next year, this programme will command funding and support to ensure that elderly people, families on low incomes with babies and sick and disabled people never again have to face the rigours of exceptionally cold weather as unprotected as they are this winter.

The third component of a programme——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am winding up.

The third component of a programme to meet this crisis is an adequate pension, and perhaps it is the most important component of all. There is no way around that. That is why Labour is committed to an immediate increase of £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 a week for married couples and committed to preserving and consolidating the state earnings-related pension scheme, which the Government want to erode and destroy, to restoring the link with earnings that the Government broke so that pensioners share in rising living standards with the rest of the community and to providing the £5 a week special winter fuel premium. Labour believes in providing decent pensions, good health and welfare services and, above all, adequate heating for pensioners who have given their working lives for this country. I submit that those policies and the Labour Government who would implement them have never been needed more than at this time.

5.6 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. John Major): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"'recognises the substantial improvement in the levels of supplementary benefit payments together with the containment of inflation, the extension and improvement of heating additions and the introduction of a statutory entitlement to cold weather payments to assest vulnerable groups; notes that these provisions are all running at record levels; and welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to provide good health and social services to the pensioners of this country'."

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) began his speech by misquoting my comments, misunderstanding the scheme and misinterpreting — deliberately, I suspect — the announcement that I made yesterday. He did not respond — it was easily noticeable to the House that he did not — to the specific question by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) about whether his winter premium scheme is or is not contained within the £3·6 billion by which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) threatens to raise taxes. I offer the hon. Member for Oldham, West, an opportunity: is it, or is it not, contained within that £3·6 billion, which is the maximum, we are told, by which taxes will be raised? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The hon. Gentleman is silent.

Mr. Meacher: I shall gladly answer. The Government propose, as the Chancellor did in the autumn statement a month or two ago, to increase public expenditure this year by £4·5 billion. That would easily provide an extra £150 for the elderly. The Government should put the money there, not into electoral tax bribes for the better-off.

Mr. Major: Now we know the answer. It is that the hon. Gentleman does not know, and will not say, that this is yet another in those long lists of cynical and bogus promises which he knows he cannot meet, yet which he repeatedly makes every time he rises to his feet.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: I shall not give way. *[Interruption.]* I shall get on with my speech.

This morning the hon. Member for Oldham, West seemed to extend even his previous promises about the winter premium scheme. In composite 14 at the Labour party conference, it was to be for 13 weeks or so. This morning, when the hon. Gentleman conducted an interview on the "Today" programme, he seemed to commit himself for a far longer period. We shall carefully cost that extension. The fact is that the hon. Gentleman is adept at making promises which he knows he cannot keep and does not intend to keep.

The hon. Gentleman claims that he was in contact with our press office and sought certain information. I understand that he particularly sought night temperatures separately, which we have said we shall speedily provide and pass on to him. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I shall either pass them on to him directly or via the CIA, whichever option he prefers.

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I shall not give way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman is not concerned about the people who are freezing, only about the money. The Government should and can find the money for these people.

Mr. Major: I shall come specifically to other points when I have dealt with the dross of the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. This is a debate, and I shall talk about the problems and our practical propositions when I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The hon. Gentleman talks of an electricity discount scheme and criticises bureaucracy at the same time. I seem to recall that that needed a vast amount of documentation to support it, with 40 to 50 specific questions, most of which included the magic words:

"write to the Department of Energy for information."

We will come specifically to fuel prices. The hon. Gentleman may not like this, but it is a fact that since the last election domestic gas and electricity prices have fallen in real terms, gas by 7 per cent. and electricity by 10 per cent. In real terms domestic gas now costs less than it did in 1970. The hon. Gentleman may care also to bear in mind that the increase for electricity has been about 2 per cent. a year. It rose 11 times as fast when the Labour party was in power as it does today. That is something that he might usefully bear in mind.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Clearly the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not rise when I am on my feet. Is the hon. Gentleman seeking to raise a point of order?

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is deliberately misleading the House, as the Prime Minister did yesterday. The figure since the last election——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Speaker has ruled that allegations that a Minister or any hon. Member is deliberately misleading the House are out of order. The hon. Gentleman must not say that.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Ashton: Much of the debate this afternoon has been about the Prime Minister——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman was rising to withdraw the use of the phrase "deliberately misleading". I very much hope that he will do so.

Mr. Ashton: I rise to seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you ask me to withdraw those words, I shall do so, but I seek your guidance. When the Prime Minister deliberately makes a statement, as she did yesterday, and the Minister makes a statement today about what has happened since the last election, since 1979, what phrase can we use for this deliberate mis—whatever it is?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might have made a more generous and less grudging withdrawal. I advise him to do so.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that this will clarify the matter. In a written answer——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Neither the contents of speeches nor answers to questions are matters for the Chair. If there are matters which hon. Members think should be rebutted, I hope that they will seek to do so in the course of the debate.

Mr. Major: No doubt it would be of considerable pleasure to the House if the hon. Lady were to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She might then make the remarks that she has sought to make in a bogus fashion just now.

Dr. McDonald *rose*——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. The whole House is anxious to hear the Minister's speech. If there are matters with which hon. Members disagree, they will have the opportunity in the course of the debate to catch my eye. I hope that the Minister will be given the right to make his speech, which is the right of every hon. Member.

Mr. Major: It becomes noticeable, does it not, that members of Her Majesty's Opposition seem disinclined to proceed with the debate and to determine what realistically may be done to solve the special problems that exist? There are specific matters that I wish to deal with later which even the most boneheaded Member of the Opposition might conceivably find of some interest. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] If hon. Members who shout "Name him" think the hon. Member may come well out of it were I to do so, I fear that I must disabuse them.

We are having this debate today because yesterday the Leader of the Opposition changed his mind and changed the business of the House for today. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of the issue. Because of its importance, it was decided that we would have the debate today. It is interesting to note that the debate which he previously had in mind was to be on the economic crisis which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook keeps inventing, but that has been postponed. The crisis is off for today. It can apparently wait to be reinvented at a later date. Like Bunter's postal order, the crisis never comes, however much Bunter promises.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose*——

Mr. Major: Even with the change in the business, one thing that the Opposition will not like — the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) is among those hon. Members—is listening, because facts disturb them, and reality disturbs them.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that when the Minister referred to a boneheaded Member he must have meant me, as I am surely the boniest-headed Member in the Chamber. If that is the case, he ought to give way. He should answer the point that I make, which is that he has got his statistics wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not use bogus points of order to make the intervention that is otherwise denied them.

Mr. Major: I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on becoming spokesman for the arts, an appointment which the whole House welcomes. I accept that the hon. Gentleman has much more inside his head than on top of it. For that reason, if for none other, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Fisher: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I am sure he is aware of his Government's statistics. In answer to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald), the Under-Secretary of State for Energy explained clearly to the House that gas prices had risen in current terms by 124 per cent. since 1979. Will the Minister explain that?

Mr. Major: If, upon reflection——

Dr. McDonald: What about the written answer?

Mr. Major: The hon. Lady has a delightful dulcet tone. I think that it would be more to the general agreement of the House if she were to rise in her place later and utter then rather than now. If, upon reflection, when I have studied the record in *Hansard*, I find that I inadvertently misled the House, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and willingly acknowledge that fact.

In changing the business, the Leader of the Opposition was doubtless anxious to demonstrate the concern of the Labour party over the difficulties that the elderly face during this extreme weather. They do face problems. I propose to address those problems directly in a moment.

I would have been more impressed with the right hon. Gentleman's concern had his record in this issue not been so clear. We know that he supported the year-long miners' strike and a series of other industrial disputes without one peep on behalf of those who were suffering, whether the elderly, the sick, the disabled or whoever else. I might have accepted his concern even more if during those disputes he had bombarded the House, including the Order Paper, with questions that reflected his concern for the vulnerable. The fact remains, however, that he supported the miners' strike. He showed no public concern for the elderly whatsoever during a winter of savage industrial disruption. We know now the depths of his concern. The elderly come first after his support for militancy, his self-interest and the Labour party. That is the position of the elderly. They are to be the shock troops in the right hon. Gentleman's campaign on behalf of the Labour party and second to every interest of his own.

I turn specifically to the matter which, for the Government at least, is of prime concern.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Minister has spoken for 14 minutes before reaching the main topic.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman may have lunched well if not wisely. If he wishes me speedily to proceed to the issues, perhaps he will permit me to do so. Perhaps the most vulnerable of all members of society are the elderly who live on their own. I shall address myself specifically to the social security benefits that are available to them, but there is — *[Interruption.]* The silence of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and others might be appreciated by many more hon. Members than myself.

Whatever social service and social security help is available—and it is substantial—many vulnerable people are often proud, independent and determined to manage on their own. They are disinclined to bother others even though they may often need help, whomsoever may be involved. I hope that in these unprecedented weather

conditions others who are fit and healthy will unobtrusively keep an eye on their vulnerable neighbours and offer help, or call for statutory help if that is needed.

Mr. Wareing: What is the Minister going to do?

Mr. Major: I shall come to that. Such action will be increasingly valuable and may avoid unnecessary hardship or tragedy, and would be utterly in keeping with the long-standing tradition of community care in Britain.

This morning one national newspaper — *Today* — printed a poster bill for the housebound to place in their windows should it be necessary to do so. I believe that the newspaper will continue to do that, and I welcome the initiative. It is a simple and excellent illustration of what can be done and I hope that everyone, even those Opposition Members who seem to have nothing more on their minds than to scream mindless abuse at me, will be alert to the needs of their neighbours during this severe winter weather.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Major: When the hon. Gentleman talks sense I shall give him the Floor to do so, but I fear that it may be a long time before he does so.

In making my plea, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do so without any attempt——

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I endorse entirely what the Minister has said about the admirable act which *Today* and some other newspapers have performed in printing a poster for the housebound. If old people take the notice and stick it in their windows, if neighbours respond, as I hope that they will, and if the old people say, "It is all very well for you to come here, but I am afraid to turn on my heating because I cannot afford the bill that will ensure", what will the Government's response be to the bills that appear in old people's windows?

Mr. Major: It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said yesterday and on other occasions. We are determined that the elderly should keep warm during this extremely cold spell. That is why all the three tiers of help for heating, whether supplementary benefit, heating additions, or the new statutory entitlement to cold weather payments, have been improved in real terms during the Government's lifetime. The right hon. Gentleman cannot duck that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I make no apologies for drawing the importance of neighbourhood help in these extreme weather conditions to the attention of the House. Whatever social security and social service assistance there is—and it is substantial—there are those who are left alone and who, through their own pride and independence, may miss the help that is available. I have suggested that their neighbours should ensure that where necessary help is directed to them.

The main focus of concern——

Mr. Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall) *rose*——

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Major: Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), are anxious that I should make progress, and that is what I propose to do for a moment or two.

It is clear that the main focus of concern is the system of special payments at times of exceptionally cold weather. I make no apologies for reminding the House—not for the first time—that they have always been only one part, and a small part, of a substantial overall network of financial support. The primary help for those on supplementary benefit for heating is through the regular supplementary benefit weekly payments. These payments are made to cover normal living expenses, including heating costs.

Further, there is a substantial system of heating additions. Extra money is paid each week throughout the year to those with special heating needs.

Mr. Wareing: On that point——

Mr. Dobson: Nineteen minutes.

Mr. Major: It was this Government who put the payments formally on a regulated entitlement basis in 1980. That was not specifically acknowledged by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The Government——

Mr. Wareing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman can prevent his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras from saying "19 minutes" or "20 minutes" like an agitated parrot with constipation, I may conceivably give way to him, but not until that has been done.

Mr. Stuart Holland: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Major: We have improved and considerably extended the categories of people who receive help through heating addition. They now go automatically——

Mr. Wareing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Major: The payments now go automatically to householders aged 65 or over——

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Robert Atkins: Wareing by name and wearing by nature.

Mr. Wareing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister referred in a derogatory way to an Opposition Member. The hon. Gentleman pointed in my direction and I have a feeling that he was pointing at me. I wished to ask him whether he would restore the heating additions, or whether he would take them away from the available scale margin under which he introduced them just a couple of years ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already made it clear to the House that I deprecate bogus points of order being used as masks for interventions which hon. Members desire to make but have been denied the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Major: I was seeking to stress that the higher rate of heating addition is now paid automatically to those over 65 and to disabled people receiving attendance allowance or mobility allowance.

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not persist in this fashion. He knows that if the Minister or any other hon. Member chooses not to give way, he should not persist in seeking to intervene. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

Mr. Major: The House will be surprised that the specific increases in heating additions did not form a material part of the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. Apparently he overlooked them. Nor did he mention that the latest figures show that nine tenths of pensioners on supplementary benefit receive a heating addition, compared with only about 70 per cent. during the period of the Labour Government. He did not mention also that there had been a significant increase in the value of the payments after taking account of inflation, an increase well above anything that was provided by any previous Government. We are bound to wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is misinformed, or is seeking to misinform, when he lays charges before the House of the sort that we have heard today.

Regular help with heating costs is now over £400 a year for the average pensioner aged 65, and over £600 for the very elderly who are over 85 and for the severely disabled. The scale of that help is in sharp contrast to the impression given by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, and is notably more comprehensive than anything provided when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the Department.

That is not all. The help that I have already outlined will enable people to meet their fuel bills and to keep warm. The help is there throughout the year and is paid weekly, winter and summer. However, we recognise that people look for extra help when the weather is particularly savage.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose*——

Mr. Major: That is why we placed the severe weather payments on a clear statutory basis, with a known entitlement. I must make it clear to the House that such arrangements have always been intended to deal with exceptional weather conditions to provide extra reassurance to people so that they turn their heating up at times of maximum cold.

Mr. Rees: As we are dealing with realities, I advise the Minister that an old-age pensioner, from the part of Leeds that I represent, gave advice to other pensioners on the radio today. Feelings are running high and he said, "I do not intend to die because of the cold. I am going to have my heating on and, if needs be, I will go to gaol." That was heard throughout the country.

Although not strictly relevant to that point, I should like to ask the Minister whether, before the debate ends, he will arrange for an official from the Department of Energy to come to the House. Whatever the scheme, some old-age pensioners will have on only one bar and they will not have the heating on overnight because they are afraid of the bill that will come later. Despite the £5 allowance that was announced, we must do something more. Officials from the Department of Energy must talk to the gas people, the electricity people and others. The bad weather may last for only a fortnight, but old people are cold in my area and in others, and we must do something to help them.

Mr. Major: We have heard the right hon. Gentleman mention the comments of those who are worried about their personal position. I reiterate the assurance that I sought to give in the past. In these savage and unprecedented weather conditions, we wish to ensure that people keep their heating on and that they keep warm. I hope that there is no doubt about that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The old-age pensioner said that he could not afford to.

Mr. Major: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish. Most people pay their heating bills at the end of a quarter. The sum total of the quarter's bill is presented to them at the end of the 13-week period. Many people may not have borne in mind the fact that December 1986 was almost the mildest December since records have been kept. They may well find that they used less fuel that month than they previously would have budgeted for.

. . In any event, the Leader of the Opposition, who is more the leader of the yobbo tendency today than of anything else, might do well to set a better example to this Back Benchers if he does not want the true spirit of the Labour party to be too well known outside the House.

Mr. Kinnock: The Minister has been speaking for 27 minutes. There are people dying in this country, and people who are cold and poor, but all that the hon. Gentleman has done is to make inferior debating society points. He plainly does not give a damn. He should either get down to the issue, or sit down and let people speak who know about the issue.

Mr. Major: As it happens, I have spent most of the 27 minutes listening to inane fifth-form interventions such as that one. While the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues try to spread fear and despondency, we are trying to reassure people that they should keep their heating on, and that is what we shall continue to do. I made that absolutely clear yesterday. Even the right hon. Gentleman should have understood, because I told him often enough, that people should keep their heating on and keep warm. I made it equally clear yesterday that in these circumstances the trigger point will overwhelmingly be reached this week, but even if it is not reached in some areas, payment will be made.

We have taken immediate action to alert local and regional offices to that statement and to our intention to make that payment. We are placing advertisements in the national press tomorrow, if space can be found, or on Friday if it cannot. All 45 local radio stations in Britain and Northern Ireland will carry commercials advertising those payments, seven times a day from tomorrow. Local offices have been asked to advertise through the local press as quickly as possible and to make the new leaflets, now being distributed, available in their areas. Both the advertisements and the leaflets contain simple claim forms so that people can obtain the payment.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Major: We have been especially concerned with the immediate plight of those who find themselves without any shelter at all during these appalling weather conditions. In addition to what I shall say about that, I give an undertaking to the hon. Member for Oldham, West that we shall look carefully and speedily at the specific suggestions that he made to deal with that problem.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Major: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will wait a moment. We have already been in touch with the major voluntary organisations and are actively helping to co-ordinate the practical aid. I applaud their efforts, and I am glad to say that we have also been able to offer additional funds to enable them to expand their range of activities and to act more rapidly. We have, in effect, agreed to underwrite their additional expenses for the "crisis intervention" work that they are doing during this period of extremely savage weather.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Major: Their efforts, and ours, are being co-ordinated by Crisis at Christmas. By today, several new night shelters will have been opened in London, offering sleep, shelter and food to people who need it. Some people may choose not to go into shelters or hostels even in the present conditions, because that, alas, is their culture. The voluntary organisations are continuing their excellent work in going out to those people and offering what help they can. We are prepared to back those efforts, and we are actively exploring other ways in which we might help. There is space in several resettlement units and in Salvation Army units. I am delighted that the Bishop of London has asked many parish priests to open their church halls while the savage weather continues. Those are helpful and useful initiatives and I hope that homeless people will take advantage of them.

Mr. Dobson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I welcome the measures that he has announced. I welcome also the efforts which the churches, borough councils and charities are making. However, the Minister should remember that the 6,000 homeless people who live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London, and the 20,000 people who are sleeping rough, did not come down with the snow and that they will not go away when it melts. We need to stop the unemployment that has made them homeless. We need money to build houses so that those people have somewhere decent to live, and we need decent levels of benefit so that they can be looked after in the interim. That crisis continues and does not exist only in periods of bad weather.

Mr. Major: It would also be helpful if some local authorities made more attractive and relevant use of the voids that they have, because they can often offer specific help, perhaps not least in the London borough of Camden, about which the hon. Gentleman knows so much.

Mr. Benn: Will the Minister clarify one point?

Mr. Major: I shall not give way to the right hon. Gentleman, because many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. In his usual graceless fashion the Leader of the Opposition said that the debate was making slow progress, so I shall not give way.

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) introduced a scheme.

Mr. Major: If the right hon. Gentleman introduced a scheme, I am sure that he will catch Mr. Speaker's eye and be able to elaborate on that.

Earlier today the hon. Member for Oldham, West apparently advocated a nationwide insulation scheme. He did not say whether he had costed his plan or what it would be. He did not say whether it was agreed with his right hon. Friend the Shadow Chancellor, or whether it was genuine or another gimmick. However, whatever it may be, I must say that we have been promoting voluntary insulating projects for years. In 1980 the total number of such projects was under half a dozen. Expansion since then has been dramatic. There were 200 in 1984, there are some 360 now and many more are at the planning stage. As a result of the project, the home conditions of over 200,000 on low incomes have been made more comfortable and the total cost to public funds for the voluntary work is often funded through the public sector, in spite of what the Leader of the Opposition may have muttered. The total cost to public funds now amounts to over £30 million a year.

Even earlier today, at breakfast time, we heard yet again about the plan of the hon. Member for Oldham, West for a £5 winter premium. However, despite repeated challenges as to where the money will come from, there has been no answer.

There is one further critical factor in ensuring that people are kept warm — the price of fuel. Whatever reflection I may subsequently make upon the statistics challenged by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, it is undoubtedly true that the level of inflation in fuel prices during the period of the previous Labour Government was infinitely higher than anything that has occurred subsequently. The Opposition's effrontery in tabling the motion before us today is absolutely breathtaking.

There are three tiers of support for heating. First, there is supplementary benefit, where the levels have been increased. Secondly, there are heating additions, where the levels have also been increased, the number of people entitled has been extended and it has been made a statutory weekly payment. Thirdly, of course, there is the exceptionally severe weather payment, which has also been put on a statutory basis.

We have substantially eliminated fuel inflation and we have expanded the insulation project. The value of pensions, despite the hon. Member for Oldham, West's extremely perverse statistics, has been increased and inflation has been contained. I am content to let our substantial record of practical help stand against the repeated uncosted promises of the Opposition. Their fine words and promises will keep no one warm. Our record of practical assistance throughout the benefits system and in the other policies that I have outlined will keep people warm. I invite the House to endorse all that and to reject the Opposition's motion.

5.43 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I do not think that many of the pensioners and those on low incomes and supplementary benefit who are in the qualifying categories for exceptionally severe weather payments can take much comfort from the supposed assault launched by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) or, more to the point — as he is the individual in the position to take the decisions — from the Minister's apparently complacent attitude. Given the scale of the problem we read about in our newspapers, see each night on our television screens and hear about daily from our constituents, how any Minister can say he is content defies belief.

I welcome one aspect of the Minister's speech. During the latter part of his remarks, he announced the efforts that he is making on homelessness. Such efforts are essential. I should like to make an additional suggestion.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

There has been considerable debate, especially within London since the abolition of the Greater London council, as to how the voluntary organisations will fare. It might be worth the Department's time to make available a civil servant, or several civil servants, to look at how co-operation operates between the Department and the voluntary sector in a major crisis such as this. There may be useful lessons to be learnt, not just for the Government and the voluntary sector, but for all those who are interested or have expressed concern about how the pattern of care might emerge after the disappearance of the GLC. It may be that some practical and academic information will come from such an exercise.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): As my hon. Friend the Minister said, our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State had a meeting this morning with some voluntary organisations. That meeting led to some of the remarks that my hon. Friend the Minister has just made. One of the conclusions reached was that we wish to carry forward this work after the immediate problem is solved to see how we can ensure proper co-ordination in the future.

Mr. Kennedy: I am glad to hear that. However, with a slip of the tongue, the Minister may have given part of the game away. Now that there is an emergency we realise that it is worth ensuring a proper system in the future. Surely that suggests that the system is not adequate at present. To be fair, that has to be set in the context of many of the assurances given especially by the Minister's noble Friend who was a Home Office Minister in the other place, as to the future of the voluntary sector in the post-GLC age. I welcome what the Minister is saying but I think that it highlights a deficiency in many of the assurances that Ministers were willing to give to those who inquired about this matter some time ago.

Heating is not a luxury, and, sadly, each winter elderly people die simply because they cannot afford to heat their homes. This debate is an opportunity for the House to contribute its thoughts on how such unnecessary and cruel deaths can be prevented. I believe that there is much that the Government can and should do to help, beyond what they are offering already.

I would argue, as do my right hon. and hon. Friends in our amendment, that the categories entitled to severe weather payments should be extended. The present categories are too restrictive. What about the old people whose income is just above supplementary benefit level or families on supplementary benefit with young children over two years old? Clearly, those are two obvious areas to which the Government should be looking, even under the constraints of the present system. I reiterate that we consider it an unsatisfactory system. Even within those constraints the Government could do more to widen the net of eligibility for some of the poorest in our community. How are such people to pay for their extra heating? I do not think that the Minister suggests that they can do without it.

The problem of eligibility is closely related to the position of the DHSS staff and offices in administering the scheme. We all know that one of the trenchant and fair criticisms of the previous system was the complexity and what was seen as the manifest injustice that went with that complexity. The Government have now opted for a flat rate or standard measure so that payment becomes automatic to all those who meet the qualifying criteria.

The basic problem is that the trigger temperature of minus 1·5 deg C, which is an unsatisfactory measure in itself, is inadequate. Many of the elderly, as we know, live in houses that are poorly insulated and cold and the temperature in that sort of home begins to plummet well before an average of minus 1·5 deg C is reached and certainly before such a temperature, by the grace of God beginning on Sunday and ending on the following Monday, is reached.

We have suggested in our amendment that it would be more sensible, if perhaps not ideal, for the Government to take zero deg C as the trigger. More important than that, instead of using the average temperature measured over the seven days from a Monday to the following Sunday, which is too inflexible—a fairer system based on zero deg C would be to use an average of the trigger point on any consecutive seven days. If bad weather sets in on a Wednesday and begins to lift the following Wednesday, because that bad weather came on the wrong days of the week no claim could be made. Under our proposal a claim would be eligible.

Thirdly, a further criticism of the system is the fact that many in Britain, I would estimate tens of thousands, who are eligible to receive the £5 benefit that the Minister announced yesterday, must be labouring under the misapprehension that such payment will be automatic. It will not be automatic. It is worth underlining in this debate that although, by ministerial discretion, they are now eligible, they still have to make their claim to the local office. It will still take time for the money to come through and there will still be, for many, a great deal of indecision about exactly what they should do.

In my part of the country, which is rural with a widely scattered population, it is not easy, particularly for the housebound elderly, to contact the local DHSS office. It is not easy for them to make a specific claim. That is one reason, among many, why we suggest that this scheme would be a lot more efficient and effective if it were made clear when payment was to be made so that those who should receive it know that payment will come automatically without a special claim to the DHSS.

I refuse to believe that it is beyond the bureaucratic wit of man to devise a system that gives effect to that practical policy. I hope that the Government—I repeat again, within the constraints of the present system—will look at the suggestions and try to take them on board.

A fourth point about the present system concerns the selection of the monitoring stations to decide when an average temperature of minus 1·5 deg C over the allotted days is reached.

I speak in particular about the north of Scotland, being geographically the part of the country that I know best. The Government have selected, for example, in the north of Scotland area, monitoring stations at Dyce, Kinloss and at Leuchars. Braemar, for example, comes within the remit of the area of the Dyce monitoring station. Last week, the temperature at Braemar reached minus 18 deg C. Aviemore comes within the monitoring station covered by Kinloss measuring point. Last week, the temperature at Aviemore reached minus 16 deg C. The Earn valley comes within the area covered by the Leuchars monitoring station. Last week the temperature in the Earn valley reached minus 11 deg C.

Those are horrendously cold temperatures. Not one payment was made in any of those areas, because on each and every occasion, despite the severity of the temperature in the communities mentioned — plenty of other examples could be cited—the stations being sited on the coast, or nearer the coast than other available monitoring stations in that part of Scotland, do not give such an accurate reading of the temperature further inland.

It is significant—I direct the Minister's attention to this—that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) mentioned that Eskdalemuir had been the only part of the country where the special payment was triggered under the scheme as originally constituted, leaving aside the Minister's special intervention yesterday. That is because, of the monitoring stations in Scotland, Eskdalemuir is the most inland and therefore gives the most accurate information on the severity of the temperature. the other stations in Scotland are coastal and do not give such an accurate reading.

The Minister should be aware that monitoring stations that would be sufficient for his Department's purposes are available in two of the three examples that I gave where severe temperature was experienced. Braemar and Aviemore have adequate measuring facilities for temperature, but strangely those have not been selected. I am sure that that was purely a bureaucratic decision. They would have triggered payments this week or last week but they were not selected.

In the north of Scotland we are not getting an accurate picture, because the stations are in the wrong place for measuring accurately the severity of the temperature throughout that part of the land mass. It would not take a great deal for the Government to redesignate those stations to try to obtain a better picture if they want the system to operate more efficiently, as the Minister tells us is his desire.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): This arises in many areas. Anglesey, island in the sun, is the triggering point for the whole of Snowdonia. Even worse, the point in Trawsfynydd is near to a nuclear power station and is regarded as being 4 deg. warmer than the surrounding country. That looks after the other half of Snowdonia.

Mr. Kennedy: I hope that not just the Celtic representatives in this House are being abused by the system, but I understand from television that there are as many anomalies in other parts and regions of England. The fact that the English are having to share our misery is, whilst I do not welcome it, a source of further pressure to bear on the Minister and I hope that he will take practical steps to improve the situation.

Mr. Alexander Pollock (Moray): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the temperature for Aviemore and the reading required from Kinloss. I think that the figure he gave for Aviemore was minus 16 deg. C. Can he give us the relevant figure at Kinloss at that time?

Mr. Kennedy: I do not have the specific figure, but, according to the North of Scotland Electricity Consultative Council, the average temperature for the seven-day monitoring period at Kinloss was more than minus 1·5 deg C. I seem to recall that it was slightly above zero.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: I did not mean to get into a debate about RAF Kinloss, but I shall give way. I think that that does show the degree of discrepancy.

Mr. Clarke: This morning's *Glasgow Herald* said that the figure for Kinloss was 0·6 deg C.

Mr. Kennedy: I am afraid that this morning's *Glasgow Herald* has not made its way to my office.

I spoke to the North of Scotland Electricity Consultative Council earlier today and I was interested by a point that was made about the Secretary of State's failure to answer correspondence. I was told that on 16 October 1986, Christine Davies, who is the chairman of the council, wrote to the Secretary of State drawing his attention to the anomalies that she and the council expected to arise from the proposed new system that the Government were to introduce because coastal points were to be used as the measuring criteria. She has not had a reply to that letter, although I think that it is fairly clear that more careful attention to her predictions should have been paid within the Department.

It is also fair for people in the north of Scotland to feel a growing sense of outrage since 3,000 units of electricity per year is the average consumption for a family in England and Wales, and in excess of 6,000 units per year is the average consumption for a family in the north of Scotland. There is a considerable interest in the matter. It is highly relevant to people and I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind.

I have already said that people must claim payments, even the special payment which the Minister announced yesterday. That will put pressure on DHSS staff and resources. Before the Christmas recess the Minister gave me a set of written answers which showed the alarming percentage increase in claimants, for example in my part of the country, and that was set against a far smaller increase in the staff available to deal with them. If I recall rightly, it was of the order of 10:1.

There will be a repeat performance of what has happened in recent years under the scheme, even under its previous organisation. Delay, frustration and resentment will build up among DHSS staff and clients. I appreciate that the Minister wanted fairness and so went for a nationally uniform system. But that has been seen to be defective and it sits oddly alongside the entire thrust of the social security proposals, which is to go for local discretion. If there is one area of the social security system where an element of local discretion would make sense, it is in deciding what level of special heating support should be given to people when the local officer can make judgments based on the realities of the local climate which will differ from one area to another. The Government seem to spend all their time putting through the social security reviews saying that local discretion is essential. Then in the one area where it might make sense to have an additional top-up formula so that people can be rewarded disproportionately well, in the most severely affected areas they say that there should be no such thing as local discretion. That is not being true to their rhetoric or to the reality of what they have been doing in the bulk of social security legislation. I cannot understand the apparent lack of common sense in this area.

As we say in our amendment, in the longer term more must be done to obtain a national insulation programme. Many imaginative efforts are already being made in

[Mr. Kennedy]

Britain involving co-operation between the DHSS, local charities and, sometimes, the housing sector in providing draught-proofing and insulation, particularly targeted at those on the lowest incomes who, in many cases, are pensioners. More could be done to assist given that that has such beneficial effects in terms of saving fuel and such worthwhile effects in terms of keeping people's homes warmer and leaving them more of their disposable income to do with as they please. At the same time, it puts people back to work. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West fairly pointed out, the work is labour intensive and, my goodness, we need a few socially desirable and labour intensive schemes in Britain at the moment. We should make strenous efforts in that direction.

In the longer term, as my right hon. and hon. Friends have argued on other occasions, we want to see the integration of the tax and benefit system which would provide the opportunity for the introduction of a basic benefit with additional top-up credits, be they on housing, heating or whatever, which will be simple to adminster and which will meet need much more effectively, fairly and efficiently than the present labyrinthine social security system.

What we have seen in Britain in recent weeks, and what, if the severe weather persists we shall continue to experience, has been a disgrace. It has been a disgrace, perhaps more than anything else, because for the past two years there has been an annual parliamentary shambles. It has been an annual suffereance for those who are cold and who do not have sufficient money to heat their homes. Yet again, we have failed to get it right. We are debating the issue now and it is right that we should, yet steps should have been taken to correct it.

Those are some positive suggestions, and it is not too late for the Government to respond more positively at the end of the debate and with a good deal less complacency than the Minister displayed when he opened the debate. If they can do that, they will be doing a good service to some of the most vulnerable in society whom the House, as much as the Government, should protect.

6.4 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The Opposition, who live in a fantasy world most of the time, have been trying to tread the Westminster stage this afternoon arrayed as a composite mixture of Oliver Twist, Tiny Tim and little Nell's grandfather. Their lines, with much ranting, raving and noises off, have sought to portray my hon. Friend the Minister as Scrooge, or worse. I have to tell them that the play will not run. Neither the facts nor the costumes fit and their acting is terrible.

It is not so much that the Opposition forget their lines as that they forget what they did when they had the chance to act. There is not the remotest resemblance between what they have asked our Government to do this afternoon and what they did when in office.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave the debate what I believe is called in the trade a puff on the "Today" programme on Radio 4 this morning. One would marvel at the height of his flights of fancy except that one always knows that he will indulge in them. He can explode to numbers; he rants to order. Because of that, he is one of the most predictable Members of the House.

This morning the hon. Gentleman told the nation that the Government had asked the weather centre to give them a trigger temperature at which the least number of people possible would be paid severe weather payments. One sees what I mean about living in a fantasy world. There is not one word of truth in that allegation.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Explain it.

Dame Jill Knight: I cannot explain it. The hon. Member for Oldham, West made the suggestion.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Lady said that it was fantasy. Explain it.

Dame Jill Knight: Of course it is fantasy. I have said that there is not a word of truth in the allegation that the Government asked the weather centre to tell them the trigger temperature which would enable them to pay the least possible amount of money to people in need.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West said—he said it again this afternoon, although I notice that he did not dare to repeat his other allegation—that there should be a £5 a week allowance for everyone on supplementary benefit throughout the winter to cope with severe weather. I am not sure what "throughout the winter" means. Is it from November to March? But the fact that we sometimes experience quite balmy winters has apparently not registered with the hon. Gentleman. The fact that we often have two or three bad days a winter means nothing. He would still go on pushing out millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, whether or not the need existed.

If ever, Lord help us, the hon. Gentleman were to be the Minister instead of the shadow Minister, the newspapers would have a field day. I must warn him about that. There would be pictures of pensioners basking in deck chairs on a Cornish beach having used their severe weather payment to buy their railway ticket down on a mild and sunny day.

One of the differences between the Conservative party and the Labour party is that we believe that special generous help should be made available for those who need it when especially serious conditions exist. The Labour party believes that money should be doled out with no need established, whether it is bad weather or not or whether people need it or not.

Any Government with such principles cannot possibly give enough real help to those in real need, because they are too busy spending public money in the areas where real need does not exist. Such a Government would face economic disaster. It may be time to say that no Government, however big their heart and however oppulent their spending, will ever be able to shield every citizen from every adversity from the womb to the tomb.

If I may return to the remarks made on radio this morning by the hon. Member for Oldham, West—hon. Members should not draw the conclusion that I enjoyed his comments — he said that the Conservative Government were unwilling to spend any money on social security, preferring instead to give it away to the rich in tax cuts. This year the Conservative Government are spending £43 billion on social security—30 per cent. of public expenditure. If that is considered to be unwilling, Lord help us if we ever get a Government as willing as Barkis. The Government are spending £43 billion, yet the hon. Gentleman is saying that that shows that the Government are unwilling to spend money. The hon. Gentleman should

understand that there is all the difference in the world between deciding how to allocate all the billions of pounds that the Inland Revenue collects in taxes from everyone and taking further money away from those who have already paid large sums to the Inland Revenue.

The Government give absolutely nothing to the rich, and that is right. Despite what Opposition Members may keep on saying, the Government do not use the collected revenue to give to the rich. That is absolute nonsense. Not one brass farthing of Government money goes to the rich. The Government take from them. The Opposition are rather like a burglar who claims that he has given his victims everything that he has not stolen. Allowing people to keep a little more of the money that they have earned is not giving them a single thing. The hon. Member for Oldham, West is not so much economical with the truth as incompatible with it.

The Government have shown great concern about these payments, both yesterday and today, and rightly so. Many of us, from both sides of the House, were pushing for that and indeed the Government have shown their concern to help the old and the cold. The new arrangements, which were announced yesterday, were clearly and swiftly made to meet the sudden severe situation that has cropped up in the past few days. No one wants elderly people to be cold. No one wants them to be afraid to turn up the heat because they are worried about the high cost of fuel. That would be disastrous, and there has been a unanimity of concern about that in the House.

The Government have seen to it that needy people should get automatic help with ordinary heating costs. Those on the basic rate for heating addition get over £8 a week regularly and the more needy still—in line with what I have said — get over £11 a week. The announcement yesterday was for a new increase for everyone, as of right, in need.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): That increase is on top of existing allowances.

Dame Jill Knight: Yes; it is on top of those arrangements to which I have already alluded, and it will cover the three tiers of benefits.

When the exceptionally cold weather occurred, it was the Government and not the Opposition who introduced special extra payments. It was a new conception of benefit, but it was not surprising that we did not get it right the first time as there are tremendous variations. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) has already referred to the difficulties in measuring different temperatures. There are enormous variations with regard to benefit payments for the needy; we are aware that it is one of the most complicated areas of Government finance.

The calculation of benefit for help in especially severe weather conditions is a complicated part of the complicated benefit payments There are variations in different parts of the country — freak weather in one area that brings with it serious conditions while someone a few miles down the road does not experience the same weather. The different ages of people represent different threats. The different conditions within people's homes will also further complicate things. Some people may suffer problems that do not affect their next-door neighbour.

Yesterday there was a swift response to a special situation and an acknowledgement that changes were needed. I am especially pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has understood the need to reassure old people frightened about their ability to pay for the heat upon which their lives may depend. I was interested in what my right hon. Friend said about neighbours. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to recognise that it is not only a question of demanding or suggesting that a neighbour may be a very good friend at this time of special need? Perhaps there should be some recognition of the fact that so many neighbours have already helped, and that is very important. The Government are always willing to help, but they cannot replace a kind neighbour who may bring a hot drink or an extra blanket, make a thoughtful visit or offer to do the shopping. A lot of such neighbourliness is already going on, and we should recognise that.

I wonder at the decision of the Opposition to choose to mount a debate on this subject when their own record is so incredibly vulnerable. Our record has demonstrated our concern and our determination to help those in need. I am sure that nobody on the Conservative Benches would suggest that we have got it absolutely right.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend asked why the Opposition mounted this debate. It was a mistake. They intended to create a lot of synthetic froth about the fact that probably we would not make the extra payment, but when we did it was too late for them to cancel the debate.

Dame Jill Knight: That may well be right. It is a further illustration of the Labour party's inability to judge anything right.

I support the suggestion about insulation. I know that a lot is being done to achieve that, and it is important to press on.

Later in the programme in which the hon. Member for Oldham, West spoke there was an appalling item about a couple in a terrible state whose boiler had burst. The old man had had a cancer operation and his wife was desperately worried about the burst and they sought help by telephoning the council. The answer they got from the council—I bet it was a Labour-controlled one—was that the office was shut and that nothing could be done. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will consider that salutary message.

I do not wish my right hon. Friend to dictate to local councils, but, in these exceptional weather conditions, official help should be available at once when a boiler has burst, and especially when elderly or sick people are involved. It is appalling for a council to say that the office is shut and that therefore it cannot help. Let us not have that lack of help and care. The Government have amply shown this afternoon that they care.

6.18 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I shall not follow the hon. Lady the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) down some of the byways that she has entered. I believe that the people who are affected by the cold weather want to know whether the House is able to secure an improvement in their position.

I shall not be discussing the important points about what should be the exact temperature, over how many days that temperature should be measured, and exactly how that information should be handled. I want to put

[Mr. Tony Benn]

before the House a proposition that I first put to the House 10 years ago when I was the Secretary of State for Energy. It was the objective of our energy policy that

"everyone can afford adequate heat and light at home."

That was in the energy policy Green Paper which was published in 1977.

Mr. Maclean *rose*——

Mr. Benn: No, I shall not give way. I have listened to the interventions of Conservative Members and I am not persuaded that they are concerned about those who are cold. Let me develop my argument.

I shall put before the House an idea that is so simple that it may surprise some: that it is a human right to be warm and not to be driven by poverty into dying of cold. That is the issue that we should have in our minds when discussing this question. We are talking about real people. I am sure that other hon. Members try to be as conscientious about their constituents as I try to be. In the past few days in particular I have had continual contact with people who are desperately worried that they will die of cold. Pensioners more than anyone else do not want to run into debt, and until they know where they are they will not even turn on the heat.

The figure for death from hypothermia varies by 50 to 100 every year, but we know that it is about 800 or 900. However, that total depends on the doctor putting hypothermia on the death certificate. The surveys done by Age Concern, however, show that 44,000 more pensioners die in the winter months than in the summer months. Moreover, 13,000 of them die in the weeks when the weather is coldest. Others have estimated that one in 10 pensioners, or almost 1 million people, are at risk, perhaps not of dying from hypothermia but of suffering from it. They have to go through the winter cold and are unable to live any sort of life, huddled in bed under a blanket or whatever.

I do not want the debate to revolve simply around how many pensioners should be catered for. No one should be driven into cold and poverty in the winter. Many other people are also involved. The homeless have already been mentioned and I heard discussion of that on the radio. There are poor people in housing that is so badly maintained that the draughts mean that the temperature in them is probably much lower than that at the local weather station. Yesterday I came across the case of some young unemployed people who had been turned out of their lodgings because of the harsh DHSS board and lodging allowance scheme, and who had been driven into the snow as a result of the regulations introduced by the Minister.

Unless we are prepared to discuss the objectives that should be adopted, we shall be in serious difficulties. I do not want to engage in any tit for tat, as pensioners do not want to listen to that. I believe that this crisis is not just the result of this week's very cold weather but is the culmination of a series of policies pursued by the Government since coming to office.

For example, there was the decision to force up fuel prices. There is a lot of talk about statistics, but I do not want to go into them. Nevertheless, it is manifest that gas prices have increased by 134·7 per cent. as against 90 per cent. for all items since the Prime Minister took office. That is partly due to the Treasury's policy of limiting the external financing limit, or what used to be called the required rate of return, in order to boost the profits of British Gas before selling it off. Without being crude about it, I must say that those who have made a capital gain during the past few weeks by buying British Gas shares have thereby made it harder for poor pensioners to turn on the gas. That connection between the privatisation of British Gas and death from hypothermia must be made. I do not follow these matters in detail, but I believe that the cost of privatisation in terms of City charges was about £150 million to £160 million.

My next point is obvious. During the past two years the big pit closure programme has laid off miners who wanted to dig coal that could have been given free to pensioners in the form of electricity. We would not then have had unemployed miners side by side with people dying of hypothermia. Without doubt the miners' case was absolutely right.

Mr. Maclean: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I am trying to draw the attention of the House and, I hope, the attention of those who read *Hansard* to some of the contributory factors to fuel poverty.

Reference has already been made to the change in pension arrangements and to the abandonment of the 25 per cent. winter discount scheme. It is of no interest to anyone if an ex-Minister wants to defend his record years later. However, I cut 25 per cent. off the winter electricity bills of all those—not just pensioners—on supplementary benefit and family income supplement, regardless of the weather, and it gave people the certainty that they would not freeze to death in the winter. I was not satisfied with that electricity discount scheme and would have liked to do more, but it was the best scheme ever. The Government stopped it and they should restart it.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall complete my speech, as I am not persuaded that Conservative Members are addressing themselves to the problems that their policies have contributed to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was my Under-Secretary of State when we negotiated hard with the public corporations to stop all supply disconnections of pensioners during the winter and to refer them to the DHSS, where discretionary payments were possible. It should be unthinkable that people can be cut off in the winter for failing to pay their fuel bills.

I tried to intervene and to get a clear answer from the Minister on that important point. He said that he thought that no one should put his health at risk during the cold weather. Perhaps the Minister will answer my point later tonight, as I want to know whether people who fear for their lives and their health and who use fuel in their homes will be disconnected if they cannot pay their bills. I want an absolutely clear assurance that they will not be disconnected if they cannot pay their bills, or prosecuted if they can establish that they could not afford the fuel that they needed to maintain their lives.

Mr. Winnick: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Benn: If I give way to my hon. Friend, I shall give way to another Conservative Member shortly.

Mr. Winnick: Is not that point very important for those who are just above the supplementary benefit level and who live in great poverty? They cannot claim supplementary benefit and do not receive a penny of extra assistance because of the winter weather. What will happen to them? When the Minister made his totally irrelevant speech, he made no mention of that problem.

Mr. Benn: That is one of the difficulties of having such a rigid system. The Government may talk about giving £5 a week automatically. But they could set the temperature at minus 20 deg and offer people £100,000 a week while saying that it was the best scheme ever. The Government have set the temperature at a low level and made the conditions tough. Friends of mine who work in the DHSS have told me that they think that if this scheme had operated last winter no money would have been paid. The DHSS is under a lot of pressure because of manpower cuts, yet it is asked to make assessments. Moreover, applications have to be sent in every week. Thus a pensioner aged over 65 on supplementary benefit must write once a week, having first studied the weather conditions in the local station, if he wants to get the money. On the other hand, until he obtains the money, he will not know whether it is wise to turn on his electricity.

Without being party political, I must tell the House that this is a brutal way to treat old and poor people when the country has 1,000 years of coal as well as oil and is one of the richest energy countries in the world. I believe that we should adopt, as a matter of policy, the objective that everyone should be able to afford adequate heat and light at home. If hon. Members think that that sounds radical, they should imagine us tackling health problems with the same sort of measures as have been announced today. They should imagine the Secretary of State for Social Services saying that, in view of the problems of ill health in our society, pensioners on supplementary benefit would receive a little bit of money to go to a private doctor, provided that they applied to the DHSS. What made the Health Service so important was not nationalising the bricks and mortar but changing the basis on which people have the right to medical treatment from wealth to need.

That is what we should do about the energy policy: to ensure that no one, at least not deliberately, although it may occur accidentally, is allowed to die or, if possible, suffer from cold. To do that we must increase the allowances and pay them automatically instead of by application. We must extend the categories covered by the allowances, as my electricity discount scheme did. That scheme covered 1·6 million people compared with the 100,000 or more who may get the heating allowances.

We should stop the disconnections, because the greatest crime of all is to cut off the supply of someone who is in debt because he is too poor to keep warm and to sustain his or her life. We should cut or end the standing charges. I confess that I could not carry the Government of whom I was a member on the issue of standing charges. They tax the small consumer, whereas the big business consumer gets a discount from bulk supply. That means that the poor pay more for their fuel than those who use more of it.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. Gentleman say how that squares with the foreword that he wrote to a report in 1977? That report considered, among other things, the abolition of standing charges and stated:

"After considering the group's report, the Government have concluded that none of the possibilities——"

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman should not be reading in an intervention.

Mr. Nicholls: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but as this is the only intervention that we Conservative Members have been allowed to make I thought that it might be all right. The right hon. Gentleman wrote that he was not in favour of abolishing standing charges. What has changed now?

Mr. Benn: If the hon. Gentleman considers that that is the best way to conduct the debate, that is entirely up to him. I quoted from the foreword which I have in my hand. It states:

"Our objectives should be to ensure that everyone can afford adequate heat and light at home."

I just said, if the hon. Gentleman was listening, that I could not carry the matter of standing charges. Now pensioners' organisations are demanding the cutting or abolition of standing charges. We should reintroduce the winter discount scheme. Some people have made a substantial profit out of the privatisation of gas. An incoming Labour Government should freeze gas prices until the benefit of that unearned increment goes back, and has gone back completely. To the gas consumers. It is an outrage, made more so by the Secretary of State and Sir Denis Rooke marching through the streets of London with blue ribbons to celebrate something which could now be seen more accurately as a funeral service for those who will die because they dare not switch on the gas this winter.

If we cannot persuade the Government tonight to increase the heating allowances — although public pressure probably shifted them yesterday and it may shift them today—it will not be long before the pensioners, the poor, the homeless and the young unemployed will have the power though their vote to decide how they wish the matter to be handled. I hope that they will use their power to raise the quality of life for themselves and for everyone else.

6.33 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The House has come to expect my hon. Friend the Minister of State to handle his difficult and emotive brief with care and competence. Neither yesterday nor today did he let us down. The House is rightly entitled to compliment him on his recognition of the public will on this matter. When faced with an unprecedented burst of cold weather, he acted promptly, firmly and correctly, just as we would have wished.

That was matched by hysteria from the Leader of the Opposition and the now inevitable rantings from the shadow social services spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). That may well have impressed those members of the public outside with short memories, but Labour's actions when in government give them no right whatever to chastise this Administration for their conduct. The mess resulting from their economic policies meant no Christmas bonus for the elderly. That happened twice during their Administration, and when they changed the procedures for normal pensions—my hon. Friends will correct me if I exaggerate—it cost the pensioners £1 billion.

Yes, of course we would like to do more. I said in earlier debates on this and related issues that I personally would

[Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo]

like to see more done, but I am conscious that it must be paid for. I hope that, as our economy strengthens, we will do just that.

It is easy when a party is in opposition and is not required to pay for or deliver promises to sneer at any reference to the cost of welfare services, but an article in *The Daily Telegraph* this morning by Mr. Julian Isherwood could not have been better timed. He wrote about the realities that now face Denmark's health service. He said:

> "Free medical treatment for everything from a cut finger to a new heart has been a right for every Dane . . . Like may idealistic dreams it has now collided with financial reality . . . the country's economy has run into deficit and the ingenuity of the Minister for Taxation can no longer match the bottomless pit of all embracing social security demands."

That last phrase rings true for us in the United Kingdom, but it has not yet reached the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). It has indeed come as a shock to the Danes, who are rightly proud of their past achievements. But, as has been said, for them too, the party is over. That may be unpallatable, but it does not make it any less true. So when the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, in effect, that the economy could take second place to this matter he was not being caring. He simply has not yet learnt what our friends the Danes are now having to take on board—that every additional promise of more and yet more bounty in welfare provision makes the credibility of the Labour party less and less.

I, too, listened to Radio 4 this morning when the hon. Member for Oldham, West gave a knowingly false picture. He said that the Government expected the elderly to heat their homes for £5 a week. He knew that to be untrue. He knew that heating costs are part of supplementary benefit throughout the year. He knew of the heating additions to vulnerable groups apart from the elderly that are already added to supplementary benefit. He knew of the £2·20 that is paid as of right to the pensioner over 65 on supplementary benefit and of the £5·50 that is paid to the severely disabled and to the very old, but he chose to peddle the untruth that the Conservative party expects a home to be heated on just £5. That is humbug and deceit that is unworthy of a shadow spokesman—even that shadow spokesman.

But judge the Opposition not on their words; judge them on their deeds. It is true that they are not in control in this place, but they control many, indeed perhaps the majority, of local authorities. When the Labour party is in control at local level, its actions certainly do not match the promise of the new Jerusalem painted by the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

It is true that the housing authority in Nottingham has a programme of upgrading the heating provision of its properties, and that recently it has encouraged council tenants to have central heating installed on a rent-added basis to pay for it. To be fair, that is good and I acknowledge it. But it is Labour's choice of priorities that I challenge. I suspect from what we have seen and read about some of the more lunatic Labour authorities that the choice is often made with the old and cold a low priority compared, for example, with their avowed intent to have all the trappings, such as race advisers, equal opportunity watchdogs, et al, rather than devote those large sums to home improvement, particularly for the elderly.

I understand that it has been estimated that central heating can be provided for perhaps £1,000 to £1,200 per home. On that basis, about 20 homes for the elderly could be properly heated for the cost of just one of the planned snoopers. It is not only the Labour authorities' overbearing obsession with bureaucracy, but their slavish devotion to public sector new-build before all else that militates against the ability to upgrade more council homes than they are tackling at present. They claim that they could do more if only the Government would let them spend all their capital receipts. It is much more to the point to ask whether they are getting value from what they spend now.

It is the positive discouragement by Labour authorities of private sector development and the positive lack of encouragement to use all other agencies of provision other than themselves as landlords that diverts resources which can and should be used to improve the quality of existing housing stock, particularly the homes of the elderly. Whatever we spend on gas, electricity or coal, if a house is badly insulated or the elderly are physically unable to do the routine precautionary things that we younger adults take for granted, the old will remain cold.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly, as I am sure he does, about insulation, why has he not said anything against his Government, who stopped the insulation programme under the new social security legislation?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will elaborate on that point, but there are other ways— *[Interruption.]* I have not ducked this matter. If hon. Members refer to my earlier remarks as reported in *Hansard*, they will find that I said that I hoped that my Government would do more. I take the matter no further than that.

This issue is not for the Government alone, nor is it for the Government and local authorities alone. In common humanity, we all can and should make a contribution. I pay a sincere tribute to the initiative and on-going support for the old and cold given by our local newspaper, the Nottingham *Evening Post*. In December 1985 that news paper sought to harness the basic good will of Nottingham's people and raised nearly £12,000 to help 250 special cases of need. This year, it is running a similar fund to assist not only the special hardship cases brought to its attention but, when necessary, to provide support for those who clearly are in need of such help and, for whatever reason, fall outside the qualifying categories.

No matter how clever we think we are here in Parliament, there will always be such marginally excluded persons. It is splendid that this is still a society which cares enough voluntarily to seek to fill that gap. The staff of that newspaper have done more than just offer their good offices as a point of collection. They have put together a team of advisers from the DHSS and the county social services department, and have put the Lord Mayor of the city in the chair to deal with cases put before them. The sums needed may not be large. They have set an upper limit of £100. That appears to be satisfactory and is based upon the helpful advice of senior DHSS advisers.

The paper was swift to react to the Minister of State's announcement yesterday. A coupon will appear in today's edition of the Nottingham *Evening Post*, dealing with the Government's special payment initiative, and, obviously,

the newspaper's own care-line service for the old and cold. I hope that that action will be repeated throughout the country by similar newspapers.

I also pay tribute to one of our local industrial giants which has a social conscience. The Boots company has joined the newspaper's initiative and provided 500 special hypothermia warning thermometers carrying details of emergency telephone numbers as well as easily followed advice if the room temperature falls to an unacceptable level. I am not a religious person, but a certain phrase readily comes to mind:

"Blessed are they that give."

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman contemplate that, for the purpose of the regulations, the critical temperature is not that of the room in which an old person is situated, but the temperature read at the National Climatological Message Centre?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman may be trying to get his remarks on the record. It is unbecoming of him to denigrate the efforts of Boots to direct some help and advice into the room in which an elderly person is trying to keep warm. That seems to me to be sensible advice.

The line for benefit has to be drawn somewhere. Wherever it is drawn, the knee-jerk reaction of the Opposition will be the same. I am concerned that, although I can defend the line in normal circumstances, the present arctic conditions must be a nightmare to those who fall marginally outside our safety net. I acknowledge that an old-age pensioner with a few pounds less than the heating allowance from an occupational pension scheme might find himself outside that safety net for help. I wonder, too, whether elderly people who have just a little over that £500 savings limit should not be advised, perhaps, to pay in advance some of those heating bills to avoid exclusion under our present scheme.

As the Prime Minister rightly said yesterday, a savings limit has always existed. The Labour party has no right whatever to carp at the present £500 limit. I hope that the Government will use their best endeavours to the limit of the legal restraints upon them to ensure that elderly people do not lose out through ignorance of the provisions that we seek to make. On those grounds, I reject the Opposition's motion and welcome the Government's reasoned amendment.

6.46 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): It is regrettable that the House must debate this matter. It should have been settled many years ago. The yah-booing that sometimes occurs in the Chamber on issues such as this fills me with despair. In particular, those well-heeled people, company directors, those who have good jobs and those who have never experienced the difficulties of the kind that we are talking about, who shout abuse at hon. Members who sensitively raise these matters, fill me with despair. That has happened often this afternoon.

Although past Labour Governments did a reasonable job up to a point, they did not do enough. No Government have done enough. Our Labour people began the process, but they were not able to complete it. Ordinary working men and women who have spent their entire lives helping to create the wealth of this country face death because they cannot keep warm. Obviously, we all die sooner or later, but we do not need to hasten the process through people not being able to keep warm in their little homes.

It is a scandal and a disgrace that, in this day and age, we must discuss this matter again because, outside, people are faced with death through hypothermia. It is a scandal that, once again, the House faces this sort of debate.

Each and every one of us has a responsibility. None of us has done enough, not only for the elderly, but for young people who every night are getting under cardboard boxes, mainly in London. They have come here seeking employment from areas such as Liverpool, Glasgow, Wales and the north-east. They have found neither a job nor anywhere to sleep.

During the last spell of severe weather I said in the House that emergency measures should be taken. Once again the voluntary bodies began to help. We owe a debt of gratitude to those people. What would we do without the Salvation Army and rectors opening church halls? Tory Members, especially the Prime Minister, love the concept of voluntary bodies. I, too, like voluntary bodies, but we should not need voluntary bodies for this. It is the responsibility of each and every hon. Member to ensure that legislation is passed so that such debates are not necessary.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred to the White Paper which he introduced when he was Secretary of State for Energy. What did it say? One line at the beginning gives the first priority for energy policy. It states that our objective shold be to ensure that

"everyone can afford adequate heat and light at home."

They do not have that, although some do. Those of us with elderly relatives must help them, and rightly so, because we are more fortunate. But all elderly people do not have relatives. Many are wholly alone and have nothing except state assistance.

I heard the Prime Minister say—*[Interruption.]* I am coming to that. There is an old saying among my class that the poor always help the poor, and my God they do. At this moment poor people on the streets of Liverpool are still looking after other poor people. When there is a funeral in the road and the old person is without any assistance, everybody rallies around and does his best to help. Those people also give assistance in all sorts of other directions. Yes, the poor help the poor, but I thought that we were trying to create a society and a world—I say this as a Christian—where those at the bottom of the ladder should not have to live in desperate circumstances. I thought that we believed in compassion. The Prime Minister is supposed to believe in compassion.

I shall never forget, to the day I die, the Prime Minister outside No. 10 having the audacity to read the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. He said:

"Where there is despair let me sow hope;
Where there is darkness let me sow light;
Where there is sadness let me sow joy . . .
To understand rather than to be understood.
To love rather than to be loved."

My goodness, when I think about it, this is an occasion when the right hon. Lady's compassion should be so overriding that she and all other hon. Members should say, "Never mind what previous Governments did or did not do. We will ensure that from now on there will be no question of people dying from cold, poverty or misery." That is what she should say if she believes in the prayer of St. Francis.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will my hon. Friend call to mind the first line of St. Francis's prayer, which states:

"Lord make me an instrument of thy peace"

and speculate briefly on how well the Prime Minister has not been that?

Mr. Heffer: I did not want to quote all of the prayer, but I agree with my hon. Friend that, since the Government came to power, instead of peace we have had confrontation.

Last night I saw a brief television programme which reported on district heating in Sweden. Various local authorities have urged us to persuade the Government to accept the principle of district heating. We have done nothing about it. The only district heating that ever existed was from a power station into Dolphin square, and when the power station closed, even that closed. It was a marvellous system, and if it can be done for one area, it can be done in all our main cities. Incidentally, we can put our people to work introducing such a system. That would create employment and at the same time ensure that people have proper heating in their homes.

We should ensure that no block of flats sinks below a certain heating level. That is done even in New York, where there is a much more vicious system than we have, although we are moving rapidly in that direction.

Then there is the £500 rule. Some hon. Members probably spend more than £500 a month on meals.

Mr. Nicholls: Like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman may.

Mr. Heffer: I do not. I merely watch other hon. Members and——

Mr. Nicholls: What about the hon. Lady?

Mr. Heffer: It does not matter which hon. Members they are, but I know that when they leave here for their restaurants they spend a great deal of money. They spend more money on one meal than some of our people have to live on for a month. That is the greedy, selfish society in which we live. Old people save for their funeral and if they go on a little holiday, for example a tour, at least half of that £500 will be spent. It is a scandal.

I shall not make a long speech, because I have made all the important points. The position is terrible and we must do something about it. I appeal to all hon. Members on both sides to say, "The £5 is a beginning, but it should be paid automatically over a period of time, not merely for one week. That should be changed." From now on we should say that it is not good enough, that we will introduce an entirely new system and end the old system once and for all so that never again will we have to hold a debate like this. It is shameful that the House is forced to debate in such a way.

7 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): If I cannot agree with every conclusion drawn by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), I can certainly say that nobody who heard him on this occasion, and who has heard him on previous occasions, perhaps long before he came into the House, can doubt for one moment the sincerity of the way in which he puts forward his arguments. There is at least one other area of common ground. It is that the hon. Gentleman at least said that he was not trying to pretend, as others have pretended in this debate, that when his Government were in office everything that they did about pensions was absolutely right and as good as it could have been. That remark has perhaps more significance than the hon. Gentleman might allow, because there is nothing wrong or unnecessarily adversarial in pointing out what previous Governments have done.

Those pensioners who will avidly queue up to buy copies of *Hansard* to read our deliberations today may do so to find out what they can expect from the Government, but also to find out what they can expect from the Labour party if it is returned to office. To that extent they are entitled to ask, "What was the record; what was the history?" Therefore, there is some significance in saying that we have to look not just to the future, as the hon. Gentleman would have us do, but that we are entitled to look to the past.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who opened the debate, started it in the way that we have heard before. Without being uncharitable, I expect that we will hear it again. He gave us a foretaste of it yesterday. He did not concentrate on this extremely severe weather and the severe weather payment. He went straight into the attack and talked about the whole of the retirement pension without any persiflage. He said, as he has said on many occasions, that the record of his Government when they were last in office was greatly preferable to the record of this Conservative Administration.

The hon. Gentleman said that yesterday quite succinctly when he told the House:

"Is he further aware that if pensions had been increased in line with earnings, as they were under the previous Labour Government, the single pension today would be £8 a week higher and the married pension £12 a week higher". —[*Official Report*, 13 January 1986; Vol. 108, c. 135.]

He said that quite straightforwardly and quite deliberately. I was not in the slightest bit surprised that the hon. Gentleman was not prepared to let me intervene at that stage, because as he well knows that is simply not the truth. Although the last Labour Government passed legislation to ensure that pensions would be linked to the rise in earnings rather than to prices, they did not implement their own legislation in three of the four years that it should have applied.

The Labour Government did not fail to do that because they lacked compassion or were heartless about the plight of the elderly or the poor, but simply because they could not find the money. I raised a point of order and I apologise for that because I now realise it was somewhat bogus, but when the hon. Member for Oldham, West was obliged to face the fact that they could not find the money, he accused me of having indulged in various sorts of manoeuvres and bogus statistics. He may see it that way, but that was not the way that it was seen by the then Secretary of State for Social Services at a time when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the Department of Health and Social Services.

When *Pensioners Voice* chided the then Secretary of State because the pension issue had been avoided and the Labour Government's legislation was put to one side, the response by the Secretary of State was:

"'There is a statutory obligation to take these figures (i.e., earnings) into account, which was done, but no statutory obligation to get it right.'"

That statement was made by the Minister under whom the hon. Gentleman was doubtless proud to serve. There was

no mention by the hon. Gentleman that his party's record was anything other than sweetness and light. That is what the Secretary of State said and did when he found that his own sincere best wishes were incapable of being implemented. No wonder the hon. Gentleman was not prepared to let me intervene to put the record straight.

It must be said that that was not the first fiddle on a grand scale which the last Labour Government perpetrated. An even bigger fiddle was the one when the method of calculating pension increases was switched from the historic method to the forecasting method. When that was done it was a real blow to pensioners, but we did not hear too much from the hon. Gentleman about that. If he had wanted to turn his mind to it, I have no doubt that he would have been able to tell us that in Barbara Castle's diaries she admitted that the reason why that method of calculating benefits was changed was simply to save money. She went on to say that she regarded that as not an honourable thing to do. She said that it was done to save money pure and simple. That was the reason, and pensioners suffered because of it.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Whatever the details of the matters about which the hon. Gentleman speaks, he may be aware that one reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) might be reasonably content with the last Labour Government's actions on pensions was that, as the hon. Gentleman has been told over and over again, at the end of the lifetime of that Government pensions had increased in real terms by 20 per cent. Given that under this Government pensions have increased in real terms by 3 per cent., perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us how happy he is with his Government's record.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall certainly address that point. The hon. Lady simply cannot avoid the fact that pensioners' expectations were raised to an extremely high level, because they were told that their pensions would be kept in line with earnings. In a nutshell, they were not, and to that extent pensioners were deprived of the money that they had expected to receive. That was the reality. The hon. Member for Walton at least impliedly admitted that the last Labour Government had done something that was, shall we say, less than perfect. If there was any validity in the point that the hon. Lady tries to make against a background of inflation at the time that was wrecking pensioners' savings, presumably the hon. Member for Oldham, West would have admitted that. However, he did not because he knew how ignoble his record on pensions was.

The other point that the hon. Lady will obviously want to bear in mind is the consequence for the Labour party once the change in the method of calculation has been made. To hear the hon. Lady, one would think that pensioners would have said, "We may have been diddled, and the Government may have avoided their own legislation, but is it not marvellous, because look at all the money that we have?"

At the time that the discussions were taking place in Cabinet, as recorded by Mrs. Castle, in December 1975, only a few weeks before, the hon. Member for Oldham, West was not promising free television licences or free television sets. A matter of weeks before those Cabinet discussions he had to come to the House for the second year running and announced that there would be no Christmas bonus. That was £10 a year, at a time when inflation was almost in the realms of hyper-inflation. The Labour Government were so stuck for cash that they could not even pay the Christmas bonus. If the hon. Gentleman was in any doubt about how pensioners felt about what he had done, he certainly knew fairly soon afterwards, because in the following year, in March 1976, the hon. Gentleman was addressing a meeting of pensioners——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that it is in order to refer from time to time to the past in order to illustrate the current situation and compare it to the past, but is it in order to go on and on for a complete speech without referring to the issue before the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Nothing out of order has been said so far.

Mr. Nicholls: I can well understand the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment and it is nice that he has decided to join our deliberations at a relatively late stage.

Mr. Frank Cook: My hon. Friend has been present for longer than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foulkes: I was here earlier on two occasions, sitting in another part of the House just to confuse Conservative Members.

Mr. Nicholls: By getting indignant about his own record, the hon. Gentleman shows that he is far more confused than any of my hon. Friends are likely to be. We have the background of two major fiddles in the way in which pension was calculated, and even the Christmas bonus was removed. That was at a time when the hon. Member for Oldham, West was not in his public school, languishing around the towers of academia, but was a member of the Government, because he was a Social Security Minister. At least it has to be said that there are other Opposition Members who have a rather better grasp of the figures in their own brief than has the hon. Member for Oldham, West. They know the reality.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West would do well to consider the speeches of his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I remember that in one debate the hon. Member for Birkenhead intervened during a speech that I was making and asked:

"Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many Opposition Members would not seek to defend all the actions of the Labour Government, especially the manoeuvrings on pensions?"—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1985; Vol. 96, c. 666.]

That was not a distorted use of figures, of which I was accused by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The most knowledgeable Opposition speaker on social security matters is not here today, but when he has felt able to take part in debates of this sort the hon. Member for Birkenhead has admitted, straightforwardly and frankly, that the manoeuvrings of the present Opposition on pensions——

Mr. Frank Cook: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that we were discussing the exceptionally severe weather payments scheme. Is it necessary for the House to have to listen at such nauseous length——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Brief and relevant interventions are a definite and essential part of our proceedings. A number of hon. Members are anxious to

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

catch my eye. If there are many more interventions, their chances will be put back, particularly if the interventions are from those who are hoping to catch my eye. As for the hon. Member's point of order, nothing has been said that is out of order. It is better to leave the Chair to decide whether or not something is out of order.

Mr. Nicholls: It probably does not need saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but for the benefit of the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) I will say it, and I will say it slowly, too. The case put forward by the hon. Member for Oldham, West is that policies that have completely failed in the past to provide pensioners with a proper rate of pension, out of which they can meet their commitments, including their fuel bills, should be adopted again. As they have failed, Conservative Members should point out, not that Opposition Members do not care about the fate of the unemployed or pensioners, but that a scheme and a system for the future is being put forward which in the past completely failed to deliver the goods.

Another matter that we might have expected to hear something about today is how to finance a policy that would provide more money for fuel bills in the summer and in the winter, irrespective of whether the temperature justifies it. We do not know how it will be funded. There were a number of interventions during the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West to try to find out whether the commitments that he told us about today are part of the £24·5 billion or whether they are part of the deal that was done at Bishops Stortford. We did not manage to find out. However, that money would have to be found from somewhere.

What bedevilled the last Labour Government and worked to the signal disadvantage of pensioners was that Labour's plan, as then implemented, had not been properly costed. There is no reason to think that Labour's plan today has been properly costed.

During the few moments that I have for light relief I like to read *Tribune*. In many ways it is an excellent journal. Often one finds in it items of great interest. On 16 July 1982 it contained one particularly interesting article. I am sure Opposition Members know what it is, but I want to share it with other hon. Members. I appreciate the Opposition's embarrassment about what I am about to read out. The article said:

"A major concern . . . must be the failure to cost adequately or to make a priority of the social programme."

The hon. Member for Oldham, West may think that those words have a familiar ring. I can save him the embarrassment of suggesting that he wrote those words, because he did not. They were written by his wife. At a time when Labour wives are capable of completely rewriting the defence policy of the party, it seems to be not unfair that Labour wives should make a significant contribution here. When the hon. Member for Oldham, West returns home tonight, he will know that his wife will be able to tell him that there has been a signal failure and a complete inability to cost the programme. We have seen all this before. We do not need to look into the future when we can look into the recent past and see what has been done.

There is one point to which I should return. On both this and previous occasions — and unless the hon. Member for Oldham, West undergoes a damascene conversion today there will be future occasions—I have criticised the hon. Gentleman for making extravagant promises. However, despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman has a use of language and hyperbole that would make the late Savonarola look like a master of the understatement, there is one thing today that the hon. Gentleman did not come to the House to do. That was left to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

The hon. Member for Oldham, West did not promise to abolish standing charges. The Labour party ought at least to be given the credit for that. When all else fails, they will churn that out as well. On this occasion the hon. Member for Oldham, West did not do so, but the right hon. Member for Chesterfield did. He has a reputation among his colleagues for looking back into history at those bits of the Labour party's programme that were successful and taking the credit for them, but if there were things that the last Labour Government did of which he disapproved, he tries to dissociate himself from them. The right hon. Gentleman was against the abolition of standing charges. However, he tried to say that he had been in favour of abolition, but that he was unable to convince his colleagues in the Government. Sometimes it is necessary to put the record straight.

The report of the special group that was set up to look at ways to help the poor with their fuel costs considered a number of alternatives and in due course produced a report. The foreword to that report was penned by none other than the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. In that foreword, though not in the report, commenting on matters like the abolition of standing charges, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"After considering the Group's Report, the Government have concluded that none of these possibilities . . . by way of alternatives . . . offers a satisfactory way of helping poor consumers with their fuel bills."—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1983; Vol. 46, c. 843.]

It is not without significance that when a party takes office even Messiahs like the right hon. Member for Chesterfield sometimes find that they have to take reality into account.

Mr. Barron: During the winter of 1976-77 my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) gave a 25 per cent. discount on electricity bills of over £20 and took standing charges into consideration. Does the hon. Gentleman think that this Administration ought to do likewise in this severe weather?

Mr. Nicholls: It would have been a good idea if the hon. Gentleman had put that question to his right hon. Friend. It would have been even more impressive if that line had been adopted by his right hon. Friend when he was in office. However, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield considered the abolition of standing charges and decided that he was unable to do that.

If the Opposition were to acknowledge the link with the wealth that provides money to do all that is needed for the elderly, they would take a leaf out of the book of the hon. Member for Birkenhead and look at the answer that he received from the Treasury in April of last year, which shows that the way to get money out of the rich is to reduce their taxes so that more money for the elderly can be generated—*[Interruption.]* If the Opposition were really concerned about producing the necessary money, that is what they would take into account, but the difficulty is that despite the strictures of the hon. Member for Walton the truth hurts so much that the yobbo tendency on the Opposition Benches has to start howling me down.

7.18 pm

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I shall not take up what was said by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). However, in all my years in this House I have rarely come across a speech that was so arrogant and superficial at one and the same time.

This opportune debate arises from the United Kingdom wide weather emergency. Observers in Scotland are not too cynical if they believe that the Government's decision yesterday and the holding of this debate today arise from the fact that the south of England is affected by the severe weather. Many people in Scotland have formed the view that it is only when England sneezes that some attention is directed towards the pneumonia from which people in Scotland suffer in so many ways, whether it be in terms of industry, unemployment or heating allowances. Hypothermia and distress, we must remind ourselves, existed before this present cold snap. We will continue to have exceptional weather conditions from time to time. So I stigmatise right at the start the action which has been taken by the Government today as utterly inadequate.

Four years ago I started my compaign for a cold climate allowance which would take cognisance of the fact that the United Kingdom has different climatic zones and yet people have to live on the same pensions and social security beneifts, regardless of the outlay which they have to make. When I did so, I must confess that I did not expect that three or four years later the whole question of heating allowances would have secured such a high position in parliamentary debate. Last year it was the temperature inversion that brought the colder weather to the south of England which first directed the attention of many hon. Members to the problem of heating allowances.

Heating allowances and hypothermia have been with us for a long time. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was a Minister in the last Labour Government and in 1979 he was penitent enough to confess, in an article in *The Observer*, that on superior instructions he had participated in a cover-up in terms of the effects that hypothermia might have. I am glad to see that he has now been converted to the cause.

There is no doubt that people die of hypothermia, but for every one person who dies tens or hundreds of thousands live in extreme discomfort, where they may question whether life is worth living. Death by hypothermia might be a release for many who live in houses where the temperature has dropped to such a level that they are miserable. It is at this time too that hospitals begin to fill with elderly people who are affected by the cold and who consequently suffer other illnesses, such as bronchitis, which remain with them throughout the winter.

I suggested in my cold climate Bill two years ago that the United Kingdom ought to be divided into four climatic zones and that a regular payment be made throughout the year to take account of these climatic differences. The Bill had considerable support on both sides of the House but was unfortunately resisted by the Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Security, who now find themselves, for the third successive year, in a mess of their own making because they are unwilling to find the resources or to use their intelligence to devise a scheme which would address the reality of the problem.

In Scotland heating is of great importance. Professor Markus of Strathclyde university in 1979 made the point that the Scottish climate is significantly more severe than the English climate. He said that in terms of air temperature, wind exposure, rain and available sunshine the Scottish climate was different from the climate of the United Kingdom as a whole. Expressing the difference in terms of the cost of heating a house, he said that it would cost 20 per cent. more to heat a house in Glasgow than to heat a comparable house in Bristol, and that it would cost 30 per cent. more in Aberdeen. Those are the facts. It has not been denied that it is more expensive to heat a house in Scotland. So fuel consumption goes up. Scots consume about 21 per cent. more electricity than people in the south, 18·2 per cent. more gas and 15·5 per cent. more solid fuel.

The problem that we face in most parts of the United Kingdom is that, because, in the 1940s and especially in the 1950s and 1960s, energy costs were so low, houses were not designed to be properly insulated against the cold, so many of our modern houses are concrete shells which exude heat that is bought expensively by the people within to the atmosphere outside.

Although the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) mentioned the nuclear power plant which was sufficient to raise the temperature in its vicinity by four degrees, many people living in council housing schemes, in particular, find that it takes a lot of heat, which they must pay for, to raise the ambient temperature to a comfortable level. House designs therefore are at fault. It must be remembered that 50 per cent. of Scottish houses were built to 1919 standards and 93 per cent. to 1975 standards. This is one reason why Scotland is in its present position in terms of illness statistics and why hypothermia frequently figures on death certificates.

The average winter in Scotland probably last two months longer than the winter in the south, so we must take account of this. This is why I find the Labour party's proposal for an extra £5 over the winter period unfair. It does not take account of the climatic differences in Scotland. Someone in Torquay will get exactly the same amount as someone in Shetland. It is also unfair that the period should extend only from December to March. Our winters last from November to April and these days sometimes we are lucky to get a decent spell of weather in May.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): As Member for a constituency which, for the second year running, is, I suspect, colder than Scotland, I should like to know what the hon. Gentleman would do under his scheme if it were found that for quite long periods parts of the south of England were colder than parts of Scotland.

Mr. Wilson: Under my scheme it would be possible to change the climatic zones. They were drawn up on an easy, simple and scientifically estimated basis from meteorological information available, but if it could be proved that one area was considerably colder than another there is no reason why it should not be upgraded appropriately. If one was to go for the perfect solution, each house should be assessed in terms of insulation and that would be the fairest way; but the Department of Health and Social Security would probably resist that on the basis of cost. So one must try to find a system which is reasonably fair to all concerned.

A point has also been made about the help that the Government have been giving. I find the Government's scheme penny-pinching and deceitful because it gives the

[Mr. Wilson]

impression that help will be available, help which for many people, even with the announcement made yesterday, will not emerge because of the restrictive way in which the scheme has been drawn up.

At the urging of a Scottish nationalist councillor, the Badenoch and Strathspey district council has an additional local authority top-up scheme by which £3 a week is made available in periods when the temperature is minus 2·5 deg C., but more interestingly, Guernsey, between October and May, already gives a standard heating allowance of £6 a week and has just increased this by an extra £12 a week while the bad weather remains. So the authorities in Guernsey have been far more generous than the United Kingdom Government.

The plain fact— the hon. Member for Oldham, West fairly made this point—is that in the United Kingdom pensions are exceptionally low compared with those in France, Belgium, West Germany and many other European countries in relation to earnings. In France the pension is equivalent to 60 per cent. of average earnings, in Belgium 60 per cent., in West Germany 50 per cent. and in the United Kingdom 26·5 per cent. This shows that those on pensions and supplementary benefit will suffer most. Perhaps that is why the death rate in winter rises by some 20 per cent. among old people and the very young.

What we require is a system which is much fairer and more coherent, such as the one that I have outlined, but one also where automatic payments are made without people having to claim and without all this confusing jiggery-pokery about assessment of criteria and need and all the consequent bureaucracy. The Government said that they were cutting the red tape. Who was it who first produced that red tape? We were informed in two previous debates in the House that this would be so.

As an editorial has said, under the existing scheme the Government are playing roulette with the lives of the old and the poor.

7.29 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I agree with some of the points made by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson). It is important to retain a separate payment that varies according to weather conditions. Without it, some areas, such as those in Scotland, could not receive what is essentially a payment for that which is different. Such a payment is important to pensioners and other people on low incomes and supplementary benefit. If we introduced a scheme paying £5 a week throughout the winter, as the Opposition would like, many people would still have greater needs in a sudden cold spell, such as this, which result in a vicious rise in heating costs. People become used to a certain amount of money coming in. If an extra payment were made throughout the winter, there would still be a demand for more money. The amount of fuel used in badly insulated houses rapidly accelerates as the temperature drops and this is shown as an exponential on a graph. The Opposition have made detrimental remarks, but that fact must be understood.

The House should consider the problems of the elderly and others on supplementary benefit. The publicity machine which has operated, largely because of political antagonism, has brought home in its peculiar fashion the problems of cold and what old people should do. In recent years, the DHSS and voluntary bodies have done much to advertise what should be done. We should push advice and instructions to old people on how to get warm as hard as we can.

This sudden cold spell followed an extremely mild December, when most of us strolled around wondering whether winter would ever come. But we have been hit dramatically in the past few days. It is hard to understand that some people ignore the fact that heating payments are part of general expenditure. The Opposition say, "We shall give extra pensions. We shall pay £5 automatically across the board." Yet they know that they must cost those measures and include them among general expenditure. What Labour Members want to do and what they will be able to do, should they ever unfortunately have the opportunity, are very different. People remember that many of the expectations for the 1974-79 period were not fulfilled.

Inevitably, if a Labour Government ever give away such amounts of money, it will catch up with them. The odds are that, if Labour went ahead with the social service and general expenditure programmes proposed, it would not be able to meet the costs, inflation would be fuelled and there would be cuts. Almost certainly this would store up tremendous repayment problems in future years, which would hit the lowest paid and those on supplementary benefit. It is important that the DHSS, voluntary services and other organisations carry on their education programme, for the elderly in particular.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Elderly people know how to keep warm. They are not less intelligent than we are, but they lack the means to keep warm. There were 84,000 severe weather payments to applicants in Scotland during the exceptionally cold weather in February last year. I suspect that perhaps three times that number wanted that payment but did not receive it. The hon. Member should not lecture elderly people. They are as intelligent as any hon. Member.

Mr. Stevens: In no way do I wish to lecture or underestimate the intelligence of old people, many of whom are more intelligent than many of us. But the importance of heating is not always easily recognised by some elderly people. They are reluctant to heat their houses as they should. During my youth, many people were prepared to keep their homes at a temperature that we would today condemn as being far too low. We were used to having no central heating. We were used to bedrooms that were so cold that the bedclothes felt damp. That was reality for many people, not just for those who were very poor. This resulted in a high incidence of respiratory and bronchial problems, especially for children, which could have been relieved had people understood what was needed. Many people accepted the fact that they lived in a warm room during the day and went to bed in cold conditions. Some elderly people are still reluctant to change. The future of insulation work should be considered. Some houses built since the last war have poor insulation. Flimsy wooden structures and lack of insulation are problems.

I have some doubts about another matter. Although the exceptionally severe weather payments can work well and are given where they are needed, there is a problem with the strict weekly basis on which the system operates. I have not costed the effect of a change in this system, but I believe that the DHSS should take account of any period

of seven days during which the temperature drops to a certain level rather than use the present system. I should have thought that any seven-day period of exceptionally cold weather should qualify for exceptionally severe weather payments.

I congratulate the Department on introducing a much simpler system, which will make payments automatically available. I welcome also the underwriting of some of the extra costs incurred by voluntary bodies during this period. It is important that elderly people and others should be able to benefit from Government support of voluntary organisations.

Labour Members condemn the Government for what they have not done, but they have done a lot. They introduced new schemes such as these exceptionally severe weather payments. They extended the conditions under which supplementary benefit heating additions were paid to all people over 65 years, whereas before they were limited to those over 80 years. All pensioners who are on supplementary benefit are entitled to heating additions. That covers many more people. The payment is automatic.

The Government have recognised the needs of the elderly and of those on supplementary benefit. They have kept supplementary benefit rates and pensions ahead of inflation. Labour Members have tried to give the impression that theirs is the caring party, but when it had the opportunity, it failed to look after the people as well as we are today.

7.40 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I should like to carry on from where the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) left off in relation to what the Labour Government did. We have heard in today's debate and yesterday at Question Time about the Labour Government's attitude to fuel poverty. In the winter of 1976-77 the Labour Government improved the supplementary benefits scheme by the introduction of an electricity discount scheme. It was to cost £25 million and to assist about 3 million people on supplementary benefit. How the hon. Gentleman can say that such action in 1976 was non-action is beyond me.

The scheme applied to people on supplementary benefit and on family income supplement. There was a single payment of £5 to each family and a 25 per cent. discount on all electricity bills which were more than £20 for the winter quarter. That scheme took into account the standing charge that this Government have refused to consider. It also took account of the fuel cost adjustment which was part of the cost that had to be paid for the oil crisis of the early 1970s.

Under the 1978-79 scheme, which was extended to cover those receiving rent rebates, people were allowed to claim discount on one winter electricity bill. It was estimated that that scheme would cover approximately 4·5 million people. Although we cannot make a direct comparison with the exceptionally severe weather payments, only about 500,000 people are eligible to claim. Last year, fewer than 500,000 claimed the payments. It is fraudulent for Conservative Members to say that the Labour Government did not attempt to do anything about people's problems in severe weather. I think that the opposite could be said.

The Prime Minister told the House that the Labour Government spent only about £90 million in 1978-79, their last year of office, and that this Government were spending about £400 million per annum. Given the number of people who are eligible to claim the severe weather payment, and given the increase in energy costs since 1979, it is likely that the Labour Government did more to help people in 1978-79 than this Government have done over the last 12 months or are prepared to do under the new scheme.

This morning I spoke to people in Rotherham citizens advice bureau about problems in my constituency and neighbouring constituencies in south Yorkshire. There has been a lot in the press about severe weather payments. Many people who were contacting the citizens advice bureau this morning were saying that they had children of over two years of age but, according to what they had read in the newspapers, they were not eligible to claim the severe weather payment. Other people in receipt of different social security benefits, such as invalidity benefit, were also complaining that they could not claim. Indeed, many people in my constituency are trapped in their homes, and the severe weather payment will not satisfy their immediate needs.

The only leaflets that the citizens advice bureau had to distribute were leaflets which were given to it by Age Concern and which it has had for some time. I understand that, even when the debate started this afternoon, the DHSS still had not issued leaflets about the new statutory scheme. There are none in the citizens advice bureau or the libraries in my area, and presumably there are none in the offices of the DHSS. It is a disgrace, considering the weather conditions, that no one can contact local DHSS offices to find out who is eligible for the severe weather payment. We have to rely on the press—not always a good source of information — to try to glean the information about the help that is supposedly coming from the Department.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to add to his questions to the Minister a question as to why DHSS offices, as of this afternoon, had not received instructions about how to deal with the matter. It is not surprising, therefore, that other agencies do not know what to do.

Mr. Barron: That is right. I have put down a question for Monday to find out when people will get the payment. There is confusion because the Department does not seem to have done its job of informing the public about who is eligible to claim benefit.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) spoke about pensions and tried to make the case that the Labour Government did not do what they had promised to do about old-age pensions. As everyone knows, people rely on their pensions as their main source of income, if they are not on supplementary benefit, to pay their bills.

I repeat that, during the five years of the Labour Government, pensions increased in real terms by a massive 20 per cent. The hon. Gentleman was trying to make the case that pensions then were too high. Presumably he now argues that because they have gone up by only 3 per cent. in real terms over the last seven years it would be better to increase supplementary benefit and other means-tested benefits instead of linking pension increases to prices or earnings. If a link had been established with earnings in 1979, when the Labour Government left office, pensions for single people would now be £8 higher, and those for married couples would be about £12 higher. I am sure that

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that link and the increases that it would have brought would have alleviated the fear of many people about their ability to pay the energy bills that will result from the present arctic conditions.

Pensions have increased by only 3 per cent. in real terms over the past seven years. They have increased by about 98 per cent. in cash terms since the Government came into office. The cost of gas, however, has increased by 134·7 per cent. since November 1978. We should not be too surprised about that because the Government have not followed the lead of the Labour Government in selling gas at cost price to the consumer. The Labour Government's policy meant that there was no need to introduce a discount for gas consumers during the winter despite the discount that was introduced for consumers of electricity. This Government have placed a levy on gas prices so as to bring moneys directly to the Treasury.

Presumably this was one of the ways of funding £3 million per annum to the 20 per cent. in our society who are classed as better off then the rest. The massive income tax cuts that the Government have introduced have had to be funded, and it is immoral that so many people are worried about their ability to pay for their energy bills during the winter, or will be unable to do so in any event. Our gas supplies should have been a gift to the nation, but they are being used instead as a means of securing moneys for the Treasury.

The same comments can be made about the electricity industry. The cost of electricity has increased by 99 per cent. since November 1978, and the Government's use of external financing limits means that about £1·4 billion per annum is finding its way to the Treasury's coffers instead of being directed elsewhere in society. A direct energy tax has been placed on the electricity industry, but at the same time there is talk of a £5 severe weather payment.

The cost of coal has increased by 107 per cent. since November 1978, and the price of all three sources of energy has increased by a greater amount than the old-age pension. The average increase in the cost of energy has been 116·1 per cent. since the Labour Government left office in 1979.

The Government took a welcome step forward yesterday when they said that everyone who is eligible to benefit from the new severe weather payments scheme would receive payment for this week. By taking that action, they are admitting, however, that the new scheme is a failure. Unfortunately, potential recipients are not convinced that they will be able to obtain the moneys that the Government say will be made available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who opened the debate on behalf of the Opposition, observed that in many areas of Britain there was cold weather last week and that this week saw the coldest night for over 40 years. He explained that many areas will not be eligible for moneys from the new statutory severe weather payment scheme.

It would be better for all concerned if yesterday's announcement had applied for the next four weeks, for example. That would enable us to say that energy bills could be increased by £20 more than consumers would normally expect to pay for the quarter without them being afraid of being unable to pay. There are many who are frightened to receive their quarterly bills, and we cannot expect them to heat their homes adequately during this period of exceptionally cold weather if we give them no assurance that the Government will make moneys available to enable them to pay their bills. Yesterday's decision probably had more to do with the heat of the political debate and less to do with the low temperatures at Westminster, Scotland and elsewhere. That is no way to protect the many who are living in inadequate homes on inadequate incomes from the present severe winter.

As most hon. Members know, I represent a coal mining constituency, and during the miners' strike there were many who found it difficult to pay their bills because of their lack of income. I received many requests from my constituents to support their request for pre-payment meters to be installed in their homes. Many of those who have pre-payment meters had them installed because they found that they were unable to pay quarterly bills. It is all very well to promise that £5 will be forthcoming for this week's energy bill, but that will not mean very much to those who pay through pre-payment meters. Many of those on supplementary benefit or on low incomes have to put 50p pieces or £1 coins into pre-payment meters. Are social service officers checking to ensure that families at risk — for example, those with young children or old people — are not in jeopardy? Only electricity boards are likely to know of those who have pre-payment meters, and with the present severe weather conditions the position of these families is extremely worrying.

The Minister for Social Security, who opened the debate for the Government, made a speech which is destined to return him to the Government Back Benches in the near future. He referred to the miners' strike, and the Prime Minister spoke about it during Prime Minister's questions yesterday. Conservative Members are obsessed with miners and miners' strikes, and I wish to remind them that during the strikes of 1972 and 1974, when I was a coal miner, the miners ensured that coal was supplied to the homes with young children and old people throughout the country. Coal was supplied to hospitals and schools. The transportation of coal during those strikes was as efficient as at any other time.

During the most recent miners' strike, miners in my constituency were working for £1 a day, sometimes for eight or nine hours a day, to bring coal to pensioners, hospitals and schools. That supply continued for nearly 12 months. When the Under-Secretary of State replies, I challenge him to name one instance in which anyone suffered because of a lack of coal during any of the three miners' strikes in the past 15 years. That challenge extends to individuals' homes, hospitals and schools.

7.58 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I recognise that there is no particular virtue in political consistency, but I remind the House, at a time when there is obvious and widespread concern over cold weather and hypothermia, that I am one of the relatively few Conservative Members who has raised this matter consistently. As reference to *Hansard* will show, I have expressed concern about the adequacy of the system of payments and its operation during the past two winters. I have pressed the Government to improve and to adapt the severe weather payments system. If further evidence is required of my credentials to address the House on this occasion, perhaps I could add that, in June and July last year, when few hon. Members were thinking of this scheme, I was tabling questions about it.

I have no hesitation in saying that the system has caused me a good deal of concern. Although I realise entirely what animated the Government to introduce the scheme in the first place, since its introduction I have had a few questions in my mind as to whether it is the right way to proceed and to solve what all hon. Members must accept is an especially difficult problem.

Having said that, during the past few days and also in the debate today, there has been inadequate appreciation of the efforts that the Government have made to improve upon the scheme that existed last winter. There is no question in my mind that, for all the criticism that has been directed against it, the severe weather payments system of 1986-87 is a considerable advance on the scheme that was rightly criticised last year. When this year's scheme is compared with that which operated a year ago, there is no question that the benefits are better targeted and that there is a better chance that those in greatest need will receive assistance this year.

I positively welcome the fact that there is less distinction between one district and another. That caused great concern last winter when it was discovered that payments could be made in one area when, at the same time, they were disallowed in another area not far distant. For all those reasons, I repeat that the Government are to be congratulated on having moved forward from the system that was criticised by many, including myself, last year.

However, I confess that I am still uneasy about the entire approach to the severe weather payments system. The system continues to depend this year, as it did last year, on two essential features. First, it depends on a particular level of cold. That will always be arbitrary, no matter how it is defined. Secondly, there is uncertainty under this scheme, just as there was under its predecessor, until after the need for heating has passed, as to whether the money will be paid. Those two basic defects in the scheme have not been, and cannot be, improved upon until we consider a different way of assisting a very needy section of the community.

I warmly welcome the decision that was taken this week to the effect that the benefit has already been triggered before this especially cold week is over. Some hon. Members have suggested that that is due mainly to the pressure of public opinion and the press. Be that as it may, I hope that the House will not overlook the fact that the Government have shown a sensitivity to public opinion, and that they have not been prepared to stand on a strict bureaucratic interpretation of the severe weather payments system. To that extent, I respectfully suggest that the Government have received fewer plaudits than they might reasonably have expected.

I should like to underline the welcome that I extend to the assistance given by the Government in relation to the improved supplementary benefit rates, and especially to the general heating additions. It is always tempting to concentrate on the specific matter of the moment, and there can be no doubt that, at present, that is the severe weather payments scheme. However, it would be extremely unfair if we failed to recognise that the scheme is, in effect, the icing on the cake.

Since the Government came to office considerable progress has been made in the basic rates of supplementary benefit and on the general heating additions. Any suggestion that elderly people risking hypothermia are entirely dependent on the severe weather payments system is simply a malicious misrepresentation of that system. The general heating additions are additional to supplementary benefit and are paid automatically to certain vulnerable groups in the community. They have increased dramatically in the past few years and, most importantly, although this seems to have been almost entirely overlooked in the debate, they are paid not for the one week in the year when the temperature is low, or for the 13 weeks which may or may not constitute winter as defined by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). They are paid for 52 weeks in the year.

I respectfully suggest that if we concentrate solely on the severe weather payments without noting the very real advances that have been made since 1979, we not only overlook a historical fact, but do a disservice to the very people upon whose behalf we are directing our attention to the operation of the severe weather payments system.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I have considerable respect for his record on such matters. I am sure that he will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) argue earlier that the Government are cutting back with one hand while giving wih the other.

I refer now to the heating allowances which are paid for 52 weeks in the year. Although none of us would accuse the Government of wasting public money by giving to people who do not need it, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise—some of his hon. Friends may not—that that money is paid to people who, by definition, have or are liable to have extra heating needs and extra heating bills for the entire year. That is why they get it. The allowance is not there to meet their needs in exceptionally severe weather.

Mr. McCrindle: I accept that what the hon. Lady says is correct, but I hope that she in turn will accept the point that I was trying to make. To ignore the fact that that assistance is available to the category of people we are discussing throughout the entire year, and to imply that such people are entirely dependent on the severe weather payments, would be just as misleading as she rightly suggests I would be if I failed to accept the point that she made in her intervention.

I discount the wild allegations of neglect that the hon. Member for Oldham, West and his hon. Friends in the Opposition have directed against the Government, coming as they do from a party which did not do half as much in office as, in many ways, the present Administration have done. However, thinking for a moment about those who do not participate in our debates but who listen to our deliberations through the columns of the press and the media, I doubt very much whether the Labour party's almost weekly announcement of still more expenditure is calculated either to solve the problem or to impress the respective recipients of the largesse, another instalment of which was announced this week by the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Showering taxpayers' money like confetti without a recognition of where true need exists is not a service to the elderly. It will not impress people because there is no escaping the fact that the whole tenor of the Opposition's approach to this matter in recent days has shown that they see this as a political weapon rather than feeling the true concern that they would have us believe.

Having made those criticisms of the Opposition's approach, I have to tell the House that I cannot honestly

[Mr. McCrindle]

say that I am wholly satisfied that as a Government we have come anywhere close to solving the problem. It is a particularly difficult problem, and one to which, if we are not careful, we will find ourselves returning year after year. At the heart of the problem is a dilemma represented by a generation of people who like to pay their bills, who cannot tolerate debt and who, as a result, risk hardship and even death rather than turn up the heat. They do not seek the indiscriminate help that the Opposition have promised in the past few days. They seek assurances that some assistance will be forthcoming when it is needed and without all the bureaucratic qualifications.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that we might do worse than reconsider the whole concept of the special payments system and that we may give some consideration to whether an entirely new approach would be preferable. A system that requires a certain temperature for a certain period can never be wholly satisfactory, fair or consistent. Therefore, I would much prefer to see what I might call a fuel bonus. It is true that about every third winter will be relatively mild and that any payment that is automatic and not dependent on temperature will, arguably be unnecessary in such years. However, the benefit of being able to bring to elderly people the certain knowledge that fixed sum will be paid each winter for extra fuel costs would help to encourage pensioners and others to use their heating knowing before they do that a definite sum will be forthcoming.

Accordingly, I suggest—I do so fully aware that any system, no matter how restrictive, would cost more than the severe weather payments system is likely to cost in this or any other year—that during one week in January and one week in February, perhaps on the basis of a pilot scheme, an additional amount should be added automatically to the supplementary benefit payment of pensioners and others in need of additional heating.

It should be made absolutely clear that such a scheme would be a fuel bonus just as the Christmas bonus for pensioners has now become generally accepted as something that we relate to a particular time of the year. I do not for a moment suggest that it is an ideal solution but I believe that it contains two of the essential elements that are missing from the special payments scheme. Those elements are that it would apply irrespective of the temperature in any particular part of the country and that elderly people would know before they used the energy that a sum of money would be payable at least to help meet additional costs.

My suggestion would be the beginning of a move away from the uncertainty of the special weather payments system towards greater certainty and more ability to use heating apparatus. I sincerely hope that it would also help to end the unseemly scenario of politicians using the hardship of old people as a politial weapon. That, in my judgment, and I suspect in the judgment of millions who may read or listen to our deliberations, is an obscene spectacle and I sincerely hope that the Government will at least explore my suggestion.

8.15 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) mentioned the previous system of heating payments during periods of extremely severe weather. I agree with him that the previous system, which operated up to and including last winter, came in for a great deal of deserved criticism because there were variable trigger points which threw up many unfair anomalies whereby in colder climates, such as in parts of Scotland, the temperature had to drop to a considerably lower level than that in the south of England before people qualified for the payment.

I can remember that last winter there was only one calendar month — February — when my constituents qualified for the severe weather payment. I also remember that while the system was in operation I was a member of a delegation of hon. Members who went to see the Minister to complain about the system. We pointed out the anomalies. The Minister, or his predecessor, said that he would look into the matter. This year we have the revised regulations with a uniform trigger point of minus 1·5 deg C.

I remember when the regulations were proposed. I was a member of a delegation from the Scottish parliamentary Labour group that went to see the Minister. We pointed out to him that the revised regulations were hardly any better than those in operation last winter. We told him in no uncertain terms that he was making a major blunder. He did not listen to us. He thought that the trigger point of minus 1·5 deg C would be a fair and uniform system that would operate throughout the United Kingdom and that it would get rid of many of the anomalies of the old system. We pointed out that the trigger point was far too low. In the light of the experience of the past few weeks, especially this week, even the Government have been forced to admit that they made a mistake in determining that trigger point.

Yesterday's announcement, although welcome, will not solve the problem. There were people suffering arctic conditions before this week in parts of Scotland. I, like many hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies, have been inundated with inquiries and complaints from constituents about this matter. The Minister should have a big shake-up in the bureaucracy of the DHSS. It is strange that an individual Member who bothers to do some private research can obtain information and come to a decision as to whether his area qualifies before the cumbersome bureaucracy of the DHSS eventually announces the decision officially.

Last week in Scotland only one weather station, Eskdalemuir, recorded sufficiently low temperatures during the week. Therefore, only people in the area covered by the Galashiels DHSS office qualified for the severe weather payment last week. On Monday of this week, because I could not get answers from the DHSS, I telephoned RAF Turnhouse, which is the weather station covering my area. I found out that last week the temperature dropped to as low as minus 7·6 deg C, on Thursday night. For five out of the seven days the daily average temperature was sub-zero.

The average of the total week is measured from Monday to Sunday inclusive, but because that average of daily averages was only minus 1·2 deg C, my constituents, and indeed the whole of east central Scotland, were disqualified from receiving the payment by less than half a deg C, by 0·3 of a deg C to be precise. The Minister should look at the anomalies that result from setting a trigger point as low as minus 1·5 deg C. He did not pluck that figure out of mid-air. It was based on historical statistics in order to minimise expenditure, and the events of the past week have proven that.

Even if the temperature condition is met, it is important to remind the general public of these facts, because many people are confused about this issue. Many pensioners think that they will be receiving £5 this week, but in fact only a relatively small number of people on supplementary benefit will receive the £5. Earlier in this debate somebody mentioned a total figure of less than 2 million people. Will the Minister confirm that? The recipient of supplementary benefit or supplementary pension has to be of pensionable age, or chronically sick or disabled, or have a dependent child under the age of two years.

Many other categories of needy people would benefit from a severe weather payment. Even if all the conditions are met, the amount cannot be described as over-generous by any stretch of the imagination. A mere pittance of £5 is hardly enough to buy a bag of coal. I submit that the system, although I welcome yesterday's statement, is grossly inadequate.

What is the alternative? Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), have spoken about alternatives. I have been campaigning on this issue for a number of years. Over the past four or five years I have each year introduced a ten-minute Bill called the People's Right to Fuel Bill. One of the purposes of the Bill was to stop electricity and gas domestic disconnections unless the board had a court order. I also tried to introduce under the terms of my Bill a comprehensive system of fuel allowances, not just for supplementary benefit recipients, but for people on housing benefit. It would be tied to housing benefit to obviate the need for yet another means test, while at the same time targeting the assistance to those who were most in need. The amount that I proposed was a minimum of £5 a week, but the exact amount would be determined in the same way as housing benefit is determined—by a scale rate depending on the income of the person or family, and the actual heating costs incurred.

We accept the principle of subsidy for a roof over someone's head. We ought to extend that principle and accept the logic of a subsidy for heating within that situation. A roof over someone's head in arctic conditions is not much good unless it is accompanied by adequate heating. Such a comprehensive system of fuel allowances would have to be backed up by a massive house insulation programme and the installation of efficient central heating systems. We have the disgraceful anomaly in this country of nearly half a million construction and allied workers on the dole queue when their skills and talents could be used to improve houses, to insulate houses, to put in efficient heating systems and so on.

Urgent action is required to eliminate fuel poverty from this country for ever. Many people must be wondering tonight whether they have almost to freeze to death before they will qualify for this special payment. There is a real risk of hypothermia for millions of people in this country. Age Concern estimates that a hundred old people die every day because of the cold. There are many others who are suffering and running the real risk of hypothermia, and there are many people tonight who are having to make a choice between heating and eating, because they cannot afford both. It is a national scandal. The House has a responsibility to do something about it, and yesterday's announcement, although welcome, is not nearly enough.

8.25 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said that this £5 allowance would scarcely buy a bag of coal for some old people. If the £5 allowance was the only help that they had for their heating costs, he would be absolutely right in declaring it scandalous and thoroughly inadequate. Accidentally, he may have given the impression to the House that this is the only payment that we make and I am sure that he would not want that impression to remain. We maintain the normal heating allowance for those people who qualify through the supplementary benefit system in the first tier, and through the additional heating allowances in the second tier. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) has pointed out, this exceptionally cold-weather payment is the additional icing on the cake.

Dr. Godman: Icing on the cake. That is an unfortunate remark.

Mr. Canavan: Will the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) remind the House that the amount of additional heating benefit for people on supplementary benefit is £2·20 at the lower rate and £5·55 at the higher rate? As I understand it, that will be phased out by April 1988.

Mr. Maclean: The Opposition have chosen this subject for debate today because of the current problem with the extreme weather that we face in this country. They say that the heating allowances currently available are inadequate and that this special allowance is not right. There is a range of heating allowances available, through the supplementary benefit system and the additional heating allowances—in some cases up to £11 a week. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar has pointed out, these are paid automatically as of right for 52 weeks a year, and they are being paid at this very moment. The £5 allowance that my hon. Friend the Minister quite rightly said yesterday would be triggered this week and would be paid to those on supplementary benefit is an additional allowance on top of the first and second tiers.

I know that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West will be quite happy for those facts to be made available to the House, although he did not mention them in his speech. I will not give the same benefit of the doubt to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who, on the radio today and in his statements of the past few days, has been quite disgraceful in seeking to create the impression that the only help available for the old and cold in this country is the £5 allowance. Of course there are anomalies in the system. Whenever there is a trigger point there are anomalies, whether the temperature is set at minus 15 deg C, minus 1·5 deg C or plus 15 deg C. Wherever one draws the line there will be people who fall on one side of it or the other.

We must never forget that this system is designed to cope with the extraordinary cases. When it is warmer than 1·5 deg C, cases are already dealt with by the normal heating allowances. The normal heating allowances are paid through the existing two tiers in the supplementary benefit system. We reserve this system for those exceptional cases.

It is interesting that the hon. Member for Oldham, West said that he would cut through the bureaucracy. We have

[Mr. Maclean]

rightly cut through the bureacracy of this new system. The hon. Member for Oldham, West will not have bureacracy surrounding it in future because he is promising to give more money to all and sundry. The previous Labour Government had no bureacracy surrounding the system because they did not give any exceptionally cold weather payments to anyone. As they did not have the system, there was no bureaucracy surrounding it.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclean: No. I have a few more points to make in only a short time.

Mrs. Beckett: What the hon. Gentleman says is not true.

Mr. Maclean: It is inevitable that bureaucracy exists in a trigger system such as this. The hon. Member for Oldham, West made his promises, but he avoided saying whether his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has approved those promises. Indeed, his right hon. Friend has already warned him to stop making crazy promises that he cannot fulfil. Of course, he will be politically shrewd enough not to give him a ticking off this week, but next week, when the Opposition continue their bogus and synthetic campaign about the state of British industry, no doubt the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook will have a word with his hon. Friend and tell him to stop making vain promises to which the Labour party does not wish to be committed because the electorate can see through them.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is not in the Chamber. He has been present throughout a large part of the debate. I want to comment on something that he said. He asked why we are not providing free coal for pensioners. It is interesting that he should advocate such a policy when a couple of years ago he supported a miners' strike which drastically reduced the amount of coal available in Britain.

No one challenges the charity of individual miners who helped to get coal supplies and solid fuel through to old folks' homes during the strike, but we do challenge the attitude of Labour politicians and union members who attempted to close down the power stations before Christmas. I remember Arthur Scargill saying, "Don't worry, chaps. Stick with us. We will get the power stations closed before Christmas when the bad weather comes." Conservative Members will not take advice from Labour Members who tell us to be more charitable or to have a conscience when they supported that sort of policy.

I should have liked to hear from the right hon. Gentleman, had he allowed me to intervene in his speech, how much electricity would be available at present if his anti-nuclear policy went through. We already know that the Central Electricity Generating Board is stretched to the maximum.

Mr. Frank Cook: That is not so.

Mr. Maclean: If the Labour party's policy of closing nuclear power stations in Britain went ahead, not only would we have a shortage of electricity, but electricity prices would go through the roof, as they have done in the past under Labour Governments.

I conclude as I started. The additional payment for severe weather is paid in exceptional circumstances. The Labour party wants to perpetuate the myth that it will pay it to everybody in all cases and at all times. It wants it to become the norm. We know that when it had the opportunity to do that it failed to do so. We also know that the £28 billion that the Labour party will splash around on public expenditure—begged, borrowed or taken from us in taxation — will mean that it does not have the resources to do that.

In the past two years the Government have brought in the extra payment, which is the third tier on top of the first tier of supplementary benefit, which we have increased, and on top of the second tier of additional heating allowances, which we have also increased. That is a good record of which no Conservative Member is ashamed and which the public appreciates.

8.32 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am the only Member from Wales taking part in the debate, and we have particular problems in Wales. A study published last year showed that the proportion of the household income that went on heating costs was 7·3 per cent. in Wales—higher than in Scotland or in England, or, indeed, in any region in England. That is a reflection of the weather, low incomes, unemployment and poor housing in many parts of Wales. Therefore, we have a severe problem.

Members on both sides of the House have addressed themselves to the problem, but a solution has not yet become apparent. It is clear that the present policy has, before it has been implemented, shown itself to be deficient. It has already been overridden before it has come into effect. It would be appropriate for the Minister, when he replies, to say what will happen to the minus 1·5 deg C system. Clearly, it is not practical. One almost felt sorry for the Minister on "Newsnight" the other night having to defend such an impossible case.

We need a system that is flexible enough to meet people's needs from area to area, but which does not have the problem of discretion, which we saw was such a great difficulty for managers of DHSS offices during the previous winter's hard weather. I am attracted by the suggestion that has just been made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) of a bonus system. There should be some sort of a bonus payment. A payment made regularly every week, six months of the year, can become psychologically subsumed as normal income. Pensioners expect it to be there to live on.

That is the problem with the existing heating elements allowance in the supplementary benefit and supplementary pensions, to which many hon. Members have referred. It tends to be assumed to be part of the normal income, so it is not available as an extra element when it is really needed. A bonus of perhaps £10 for a limited number of weeks, whether alternate weeks or every week during cold weather, is very attractive because of the certainty that it will be available when it is needed.

It is not just those on supplementary pension and benefit who need such a payment. There are people on ordinary pensions, just below supplementary pension level, who are hit equally hard by the cold weather that we have been having. There are people on low incomes or family income supplement who are in an equally difficult position.

I have been asked to present one set of cases to the House tonight by Mencap. Mencap has been conducting a study in Manchester on profoundly mentally handi-

capped people which has been going on for some time now. It shows that for mentally handicapped people—usually children or young people—who are living at home with their parents in the community, the single most severe problem for those families, virtually all of which are in receipt of attendance allowance, is heating costs. In the survey, 79 per cent. of those families put heating costs as the most difficult problem that they are facing. Yet only 20 per cent. or so of those families, are in receipt of supplementary benefit. That means that only one out of every four of the families who have identified heating costs as their greatest difficulty will be helped by the provisions that the Government have brought forward. The position of those on attendance allowance but not on supplementary benefit—not only those with mental handicap but disabled people also—needs to be rethought.

There is also the unfairness of the £500 capital rule. In my part of the world old people regard it as a matter of dignity that they should save enough money to pay for their funeral, and if a husband and wife are saving up for their funerals they will be over the £500 mark immediately and it is wrong that such people should be debarred and penalised for their upstanding attitude.

Finally, let me deal with the anomaly in the measurement of temperatures. My constituency falls into two halves, one of which, in Snowdonia, is covered by the RAF Valley base on Anglesey. The temperature in places like Deiniolen, Dinorwig and Llanberis up in the mountains of Snowdonia can be much colder than in RAF Valley on the island. In the southern part, the Trawsfynydd power station warms the lake so much that there is sub-tropical life in it. That is the point where the temperature is being taken for the southern part of my constituency, the Dwyfor area, and, indeed, for Blaenau Ffestiniog, up in the mountains. That is clearly ridiculous.

We need a reliable system so that people know that the money is coming as soon as it gets cold, so that they do not have to hold out in freezing circumstances. There needs to be certainty and regionality and a broad enough net to take in all those in need. That is not the case at the moment and we certainly need to rethink.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand that the first Front-Bench spokesman will seek to catch my eye at about 9.30 pm. Five hon. Members have been sitting here for a long time seeking to catch my eye. If they do their arithmetic, we might get them all in.

8.38 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): I note your remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will not object if I do not take up his comments. I am well aware that the House regards the hon. Gentleman highly and that what he has said will be carefully noted by my hon. Friend the Minister, not only when he replies but in further deliberations on this sensitive and difficult issue. Instead, I want to devote my comments to three separate points which have arisen during the debate and require further consideration.

I was saddened and surprised that Opposition Members should be so derisory when my hon. Friend the Minister referred to the fact that it is desperately important in this cold winter to ensure that neighbours, friends and relatives look after elderly people. It is all too easy for people, any time a crisis occurs, to ask, "What are the Government going to do?" I believe that charity should start at home.

In most cases elderly people have children and grandchildren who live not very far from them—*[Interruption.]* I said in most cases. I think that it is important that we should generate greater family responsibility for elderly people.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. MacKay: No, I shall not give way, as other hon. Members wish to speak. I believe that we should encourage families to take on a greater responsibility for their relatives.

In my constituency, and I am sure in many others, people in the neighbourhood wish to play a greater part in caring for the elderly. That should be encouraged. At this difficult time relatives and neighbours should keep an eye on old people to ensure that they are adequately looked after.

With hindsight, Labour Members—most of whom I know are very concerned — will realise that their laughter and derisory remarks about the Minister's suggestion of increased community help was unfortunate, insensitive and misguided. Perhaps their remarks were made in the heat of the debate, and in the cold light of day they will regret them.

It is not sufficient to make sure that the elderly are looked after. I suspect that that is what the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) is seeking to say.

Dr. Godman: Give way.

Mr. MacKay: I will not give way.

Dr. Godman: Then stop interpreting my thoughts.

Mr. MacKay: It is not sufficient for neighbours and families to keep an eye on old people. Many old people worry about paying the bills. The hon. Member for Caernarfon rightly pointed out that there are many who have modest savings to pay for their funerals. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) also pointed out that there are many people who were brought up to pay their bills promptly. They become desperately concerned if they get into debt. They would endure pain, suffering, or worse, to avoid such debt. That is why it was desperately important that the Government should make it clear that it is right that all old people should maintain adequate heating at this cold time.

I believe that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has done a great disservice for cheap political gain by some of his broadcasts, in which he has suggested that old people would be foolish to heat their homes adequately as their bills would then be difficult to meet.

Labour Members behaved in a despicable manner and not in the interests of old people when they laughed at the Minister's remarks concerning the exceptionally mild December that we had. That mild weather means that the heating bills for that period will be relatively small and will go some way to offset the larger heating bills that we will all face for January. That is simple economics. The laughter and dismissive remarks of some Labour Members prove that they are not interested in old people. The Labour party is looking at the opinion polls and it is aware that it will lose at the next general election. It is clutching

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at straws to try to salvage — *[Interruption.]* The electorate will not look favourably at a political party and some Opposition Members — thankfully, not all — who have tried to use this exceptionally cold winter and the concern for elderly people to political advantage. That will do the Labour party a great deal of harm when it comes to the next election.

Unfortunately, I fell out with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I tried to intervene in the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. I apologise if I caused you any embarrassment. I was trying, as was the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), to ask the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who is the official shadow Cabinet spokesman on health and social security, how a future Labour Government would pay for the extra heating allowances that he was proposing.

We are aware that there has been a meeting at Bishops Stortford and that the Labour party proposes to spend £3·6 billion on a poverty programme which is to be financed from a total of £28 billion of extra public expenditure. Independent commentators are anxious to know how that money will be found. We want to know whether the extra money for the heating allowance, as proposed by the Labour party, will come out of the £3·6 billion. We have a right to know, and I am sure that the electorate would also like to know. It is irresponsible of the Opposition to promise extra money if they do not know how they will raise that money. The Opposition have an obligation not to make such promises.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Oldham, West would have explained this if I had successfully intervened. The hon. Gentleman would not wish to deceive the House, nor the electorate. The hon. Gentleman would have explained whether the extra money for the heating allowance would eat into the £3·6 billion poverty programme or whether—as I suspect—such expenditure would be additional to that programme. I hope that when the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) sums up for the Opposition, she will explain to us where that money will come from.

There has been considerable hypocrisy in some of the speeches made inside and outside the House. There was a clear impression that in the periods of the Labour Administration—1964-70 and 1974-79—there had been no cold winters and no tragedies when old people had died. It was claimed that the Labour Government had made special provision. That is not true — *[Interruption.]* I believe that the electorate will judge the Labour party's record, not its promises.

Under the Labour Government, electricity and gas prices went up because of massive inflation. It is very easy to say that discounts were provided, but those discounts were provided on the massively increased prices of electricity and gas. It was all funny money.

At the end of the debate some of the more thoughtful Opposition Members — many of whom are not in the Chamber at the moment — will be thoroughly ashamed of the way in which the Labour Opposition — I stress Labour Opposition, as we have had a more responsible approach from the Alliance and from the hon. Member for Caernarfon — have tried to exploit this difficult situation.

8.49 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): It is a great pity that the hon. Member for Berkshire, East, (Mr. MacKay) seemed to want to join in a competition in frivolity among Conservative Members, as that is quite inappropriate to the very serious situation facing many people today. Conservative Members have almost totally failed to respond to the severity of it. They would like us to believe that everything in the garden is lovely—*[Interruption.]* I did not interrupt the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) even though he made an even more frivolous speech than the hon. Member for Berkshire, East.

The fundamental question to be asked is why people are dying from the cold and what the Government are going to do about it. I have facts that cannot be challenged and that are not being given the necessary consideration because of the frivolity of Conservative Members. In 1986, 1,060 people died of hypothermia, and that does not include deaths related to cold. In March, 1986, 16,000 people died as a result of cold-related illnesses. Are we to pretend that that is not happening, or that because of party political considerations, which mean that some people have their eyes on the next election instead of on the problems facing folks today, we should stay sitting here gagged, saying nothing? Are we being asked not to agree with what the hon. Member for Caenarfon (Mr. Wigley) said in his splendid speech? He understands these matters and the feelings of ordinary people who have to face the day-to-day realities.

Is that number of deaths necessary, given that we live in a rich country that has plenty of resources? The facts available on other countries suggest that the answer is no. In February 1986 in Sweden and France 6 per cent. more elderly people died than the average for the year. The figure for the United States was 8 per cent. and for Scotland, 19 per cent. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South should find that funny, because it is a serious problem that must be addressed. We are debating the fact that the Government's policy does not respond to the problems that exist but reflects, rather, the Treasury's cash limits.

For several years now we have debated the problem of fuel poverty. Every year the Government say that they will deal with it. Ministers appear on television programmes giving all sorts of assurances, yet we are now holding a similar debate to the one held last year. People throughout the country are challenging the Government's policy. Even some of the sychophantic newspapers that support the Government on almost all their decisions challenge their attitude on this issue.

The newspapers challenge the Government's thinking on the trigger point. Where does the minus 1·5 deg C come from? It is a totally arbitrary measurement. Newspapers have challenged, just as we have, the stipulation that that level must be averaged from Monday to Sunday. Indeed, that outrageous stipulation has been manipulated to the disadvantage of those whom we seek to help. Above all, they challenge the Government's intentions about reading stations. For example, Aviemore has registered a teperature of minus 17 deg C, but that is not taken into account in the readings for that region. We are told that it is sometimes colder in Aviemore than at the North pole. How does Government policy take that into account?

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): My hon. Friend has spoken about Aviemore and the frivolity of Conservative Members, but has there not also been some hypocrisy on the part of Opposition Members? For example, the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) has been a Member of Parliament since 1974, yet it took him until 1982 to discover that there were different climatic zones in Scotland. We were raising the issue much earlier than that.

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that the House will have noted that point. My hon. Friend has certainly gone on the record on that issue.

The problem of fuel poverty is reflected in the fact that 6 per cent. of household expenditure in the United Kingdom relates to necessary fuel charges, while the figure for Scotland is 7 per cent. and for all the elderly in the United Kingdom, 9 per cent. There is no way that any DHSS arrangements take that into account. Moreover, there is no way that the problems of the elderly can be recognised if the Government insist that people with capital of £500 or more should be excluded.

It astonishes me that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) has mentioned, only Eskdalemuir should qualify because of the method of taking into account recorded temperatures. I am pleased that Eskdalemuir at least qualified. Last week it exceeded the magic figure for four days out of seven. However, the same was also true of the Glasgow area, including my constituency. In the Edinburgh district the Government's magic figure was exceeded for five days out of seven, but that area was not entitled to claim the allowance. How can the Government regard that as a reasonable approach to such wintry conditions?

Moreover, people in many parts of the country live in great poverty. A few weeks ago I asked the Prime Minister a question and the reply confirmed that the top 10 per cent. of earners had increased their wealth since 1979, while the bottom 10 per cent. had become poorer. Given that, it is not easy to respond to the problems of fuel poverty. Yesterday morning I heard BBC radio giving warnings to motorists and pedestrians. That was only right. However, we should always be prepared to give warnings to the elderly about drops in temperature and wintry conditions, and we should not simply depend on the voluntary organisations.

There are many voluntary organisations, and they all do an excellent job. They would not for a second tell the Government to stand on one side and to pursue their present policies. I have listened carefully to every hon. Member who has spoken and have tried to contrast their speeches with some of the representations made to me and no doubt to other hon. Members recently. Yesterday I had a discussion in my own home with an elderly retired man called Eddie. For 20 years he had been a caretaker, looking after people in a 14-storey block of flats. He sat and wept. He did not make cheap political points but, rather, demonstrated the reality of the situation. I would be failing in my duty if I did not reflect that in the House tonight.

When Ministers and Government supporters say to the House and the country, "Where will we get the money?", I say, on behalf of Eddie and millions of others, that the money is there if the will is there. If the position that exists in my constituency were reflected in the Falklands, the Treasury would be told to find the money, and that is what the House is telling the Government to do tonight.

8.59 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I declare an interest as 30 per cent. of my constituents are over retirement age and, undoubtedly, some of them are old and cold. I have another interest. I represent the Hebridean Isle of Thanet which this week, last year and the year before suffered some extreme weather conditions. On Monday I drove through a blizzard to get here and tomorrow I shall return home. During my absence my office has been manned 24 hours a day by my staff seeking to help those who suffer from the cold. In case that sounds grand, I happen to be married to my staff.

The constituents of Thanet will not be especially impressed by the political opportunism of this debate. They will recognise, as we recognise, that a couple of days ago the Leader of the Opposition said, "Okay, boyos, it is snowing, so let us do snow and cold this week and then we can do economic disaster next week or the week after that." His disgraceful performance this afternoon was manifest of that sentiment.

The alliance can take little comfort from its position. After all, it was those disunited parties that kept the last Labour Government in office and doing nothing. I have checked the records and there are no proud speeches, nor one word from the Liberals or the Members of the Social Democratic party, who were then members of the Labour party, on this subject.

Today we have heard of the three levels of heating assistance that the Government have introduced.

Dr. Godman The additional heating allowances have been called the icing on the cake.

Mr. Gale: Would the hon. Gentleman like to rise to his feet to speak?

Dr. Godman: I said that the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) called the third tier "the icing on the cake". That was an especially unfortunate remark given the fact that in my constituency there are many thousands of elderly people who desperately require help. Under the discredited scheme that has been thrown out, 3,000 payments were made for the exceptionally severe weather of last February. My research showed me that that represented about one in five of those who should have received that payment.

Mr. Gale: I am sorry that I gave way. I thought that the hon. Gentleman sought to intervene in my speech. We can probably all agree that the only icing on the cake of England at present is several inches of snow, and it is the effects of that that we are here to discuss. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to make a speech later.

This afternoon and this evening we heard that the Government have introduced three levels of heating assistance. I do not believe, and I do not know any Conservative Member who believes, that that is any cause for complacency, that we have done enough, that there is no more that needs to be done or that there are not at this moment elderly people who are suffering from the cold. Since 1962, year on year, the incidence of death from hypothermia has fallen except in one year. It may be a coincidence that that happens to be the year in which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was in office. The fact that the incidence of hypothermia is falling is also no cause for satisfaction, if the level is still too high, as indeed it is.

[Mr. Gale]

Today the House has not discussed providing help where it is needed. Earlier this afternoon, during the debate on the television licence, we heard a classic case of the Opposition saying that they wanted to give a television licence free to every pensioner, irrespective of need. Clearly many people and many pensioners would welcome that. I do not doubt that those who can afford to pay their licence fee would welcome that, but by no means all those people are in need, and to use valuable resources where they are not most needed is simply a waste.

I said that 30 per cent. of my constituents were over retirement age, and so they are. Many of them are old, cold and living in their own homes in which they have invested a vast quantity of capital. In other circumstances, for example if the money were released, they could well afford to pay their way and to pay for insulation, central heating and the comfort that they deserve. Sadly, they are often widows who have been bereaved earlier than expected, living in under-occupied properties which are too big and expensive to heat and maintain.

Another section of the elderly population in my constituency are extremely comfortable. They are not rich. Some are well off and some have not a bean to their name. They live in sheltered or warden-assisted accommodation which is well heated and lighted and they are well fed and cared for. They have a cord to pull if they find themselves in trouble.

If we are to address ourselves seriously to the problem and the needs of the elderly, and not to make cheap political capital because there happens to be some snow on the ground, we must build more warden-assisted housing to provide for the ever-increasing elderly population. With respect to my hon. Friend the Minister, it is the Secretary of State for the Environment who needs to address himself to that as much as the Department of Health and Social Security.

Some Opposition Members will immediately say, "Yes, if the Government allowed us to use more receipts from housing sales, we could do just that"; but we know that that is borrowed money. We also know that there is under-occupied property, not only in the private sector, but in the public sector. Tonight we have also heard about the needs of the young. It has been suggested that far too many young people are homeless, particularly in London, and I concur with that, but it is also a fact that there is too much under-occupied private and public sector property. That results partly from bad local government and management — the vast number of housing voids is a disgrace — and partly from the Rent Acts which have taken a great deal of property out of the housing market.

If we are to address ourselves to this problem seriously and in the long term, we should look, not at five quid here or there, or say, "We have done a bit more than you," or, "You say you will do a bit more than us." We should consider the housing available and ensure that every room is being used to best advantage. I freely accept that the responsibility for under-occupied property and for the lack of warden-assisted property lies equally with both sides of the House. If we address ourselves to that, irrespective of who is in power next winter and during subsequent winters, we may not have this argument. If not, we know perfectly well that whoever sits on the Opposition benches will say, "There is snow on the ground; the Government should do more."

The Government have a good record on assistance, but that does not mean that more does not need to be done. I said that I would be brief, but, coming from Kent, it would be wrong to sit down without paying tribute to the armed services which have given so much help in the past few days and are continuing to do so. In particular, I mention the Gurkha regiment which has brought the Isle of Sheppey back to the mainland, as it were, fighting their way through the snow to deliver supplies.

It would be wrong not to pay tribute to the many people who have been getting food through, not only to the elderly in need but to young families in need and to village shops which are running out of food. It would be wrong not to pay tribute to the county council, especially to its employees who have been driving the snow ploughs and keeping the roads open.

Finally, it would be wrong if we did not recognise, as our constituents will recognise, the considerable contribution made yesterday and today by my hon. Friend the Minister, who has done so much in this crisis.

9.10 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Pensioners have an enormous number of problems in severe weather because many of their houses or flats are defective and their roofs leak. They also have problems because they cannot get out and they cannot get food in. The worst problem, and the one that rightly has prompted the debate today, is that severe cold leads to ill health, and for many pensioners that means death.

As the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) intimated in his splendid speech, every winter about 90,000 people die from cold. In the last full year for which figures are available, over 1,000 people, most of them old people, died from hypothermia. Some 86 per cent. of them were over 65, and 70 per cent. were over 75. In the first quarter of last year there were 578 hypothermia-related deaths. That is not surprising if we consider the background figures. They show that 46 per cent. of those over 60 and living alone have no central heating, and, also according to the 1983 general household survey, 41 per cent. of couples over 60 have no central heating.

Additionally, the surveys carried out by the DHSS in the last decade accept that the temperature for the elderly should be 70 deg C, but that the vast majority of elderly people's living rooms have temperatures of about 10 deg C less than that. Against all those problems, the DHSS proposes that, in 14 months time, the extra heating allowance provision be removed for up to 2·5 million people and that insulation grants should be phased out.

The severe weather payments issue has been raised regularly in the House. It is sad that this winter we had to wait until yesterday for another Government U-turn. Clearly, they want to be popular with the electors. The autumn statement, the rate support grant which helps the Tory shires, and now the extra £5 a week given at the last moment demonstrate that fact. We do not mind the Government being nice. We are happy that they are generous, but being generous so late in the day does not smack of a commitment to make sure that people do not suffer when it gets cold. I hope that people will remember that, for years they were frozen out of their entitlements and only given a one-week handout when, suddenly, the pressure was put on.

As the hon. Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) and others have said, there has been a long history of debates like this. They are annual events. It is not appropriate that party political points should childishly be made across the Chamber. A perfectly valid question was put to the Minister by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the leader of the Labour party, and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees): if old people felt that were they to put on their heating they would not have their bills met, could they be guaranteed by the Government that their bills would be met when presented? I regret that the response to that question by the Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Security was total silence.

On the radio this morning, the chairman of one of the electricity authorities said that the authority would be compassionate with old people when bills were presented. Many old people need not just compassion but the knowledge that they will not be without the resources to pay if they have to keep up the heat to keep themselves warm.

We had a bad winter last year and the old scheme went back to the Government but, sadly, they have not produced a well-laid plan of action this year. Winter comes every year and some winters are worse than others. This may be the worst winter for many years. Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that, unless the Government had a plan that was geared to work when the weather became bad early, we would inevitably have an emergency response to the crisis with additional deaths. The tragedy is that this year the Government have been caught out early in the life of the new scheme by their own innate meanness.

The scheme was contrived to spend as little money as possible and to choose a temperature that was not logical. A logical temperature must be 0 deg C, the temperature at which things freeze. The logical measuring points must reflect geographical diversity. My colleagues from Wales and Scotland have made the self-evident point that measuring stations by the coast clearly do not take into account enormous differences of temperature inland. The worst thing of all is the profoundly unsatisfactory nature of the approach to the system. One should ask what old people need, should try to meet it and then should be determined to meet it.

Although we may be willing to save fuel by telling people in offices and young people in their homes to turn down their heat, we should not be willing to tell old people to turn down their heat. That is because they are the most vulnerable people in our society and cold is clearly often the worst and most obvious cause of death.

I hope that we will hear the immediate announcement of a system where the trigger is 0 deg C and which will run on a basis of at least any seven days rolling together so that people will realise that if there is a run of a few cold days it is likely that they will be entitled to benefit. The categories need to be expanded to more than the few penny-pinching categories that we have at the moment. I should like to know why we cannot have an automatic triggering of the system. Why do people have to put in forms to get the benefit? It could be given to them automatically. The DHSS keeps records, so such a system is not impossible.

Why cannot we have the adoption of the scheme that my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire suggested last year? The winter months from December to March are the months when people should have a bonus. If we examine the ideas from Members in all part of the House, we see that those are the 13 weeks of the year when people should have a bonus. If we had the unusual circumstance of winter extending beyond the end of March, we could look at it again. Under such a scheme, at least people would have certainty — old people need the certainty — of knowing that they will have money to pay the bills.

We ask the Government to think again about their plan to phase out insulation grants and, next year, to phase out heating payments. Home insulation is the long-term sensible solution, and must be an intermediate step before we change the whole tax and social security system to be fairer to those at the bottom of the heap. As some hon. Members have said, it is quite disgraceful that in a civilised and rich country in 1987 we should condemn more of our fellow citizens to die of the cold than die in any neighbouring country in Europe.

The Minister of State said that he would use the media to advertise tomorrow or on Friday in newspapers and on the radio information and advice. I hope that we can have additional advice telling people how to keep warm and avoid illness or accident. Help the Aged and other agencies are as concerned about those who do not telephone as about those who do. We must start a health education exercise, but there is no point in starting it on 7 January or 1 March. We should have it in advance so that people can have a system into which they can plug their right to benefits.

If the Government spent one tenth of what they spent on advertising British Gas shares advertising to meet the needs of the elderly, we might be making some progress towards a civilised society. Repeatedly, we are not prepared and pressure has to be exerted. My right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party had to write to the Minister of State on Monday morning to ask him to introduce the additional bonus which arrived a day later.

I ask the Government to consider what I hope are a few helpful and certainly urgent proposals. Why can we not have a national plan, a "cold aid" plan—call it what we will — so that local authorities, Government and voluntary bodies are brought together in advance to act and build on the experience of voluntary agencies?

All local authorities could have a well known "white line" telephone number for emergency help and advice. Advance advertisements everywhere could advise how to "stop the cold from killing". Additional staff could be recruited by the statutory agencies so that people do not have to wait a long time for electricity, gas and water repairs. There should be encouragement of neighbourhood watch schemes especially for pensioners, and people should be encouraged to give extra volunteer help to such organisations as Age Concern.

The Government should appoint somebody in advance to be in charge of Government policy with a statutory duty to co-ordinate ministerial initiatives. Local authorities should be encouraged to have a sort of "white alert" like Adur district council, where there is a scheme initiated by my colleagues which says to people, "If you put in £1 to help give old people a fuel bonus, we in the local authority

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

will match it." My colleagues are to be complimented on that scheme. The week of action suggested by voluntary bodies for cold homes should also be accepted.

As we also suggest, there should be a change in the rules to abolish standing charges for fuel. That charge is a great iniquity and Britain could well afford to do without it. Fundamentally and finally, we must increase the pension.

We may be greatly worried about the young and others who are vulnerable, but tonight we are discussing pensioners. This is a test of public generosity, not just of cash but of spirit. Enormous tax handouts to the rich sound pretty hollow to that much larger group in our community who have to prise £5 out of the Government's hands at the very last moment, and only for one week. Ministers should return to the Elephant and Castle and persuade their colleagues that the age of Dickens, when the old had to come with a begging bowl, asking for more, should have long gone. It is their responsibility to ensure that it never returns.

9.20 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I have been an associate member of Teesside Pensioners' Association for the past 14 years and must therefore declare a vested interest in today's debate. Membership of that association means that I am qualified to speak with a little authority and with direct knowledge of the pensioners' outlook on these matters. If all hon. Members had the welfare of senior citizens at heart and a vested interest on a similar scale, today's debate would have been unnecessary. The only speech from the Government Benches that I commend is that of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle).

Ministers will recall that I took part in the debate on the proposed annulment of the regulations on 18 December 1986, when I referred to the omission of the Stockton district DHSS offices from the list of areas and their associated designated national climatological message stations. I explained in painstaking detail how application of section 4*(b)* of new regulation 26A would result in

"close neighbours in the same geophysical location suffering similar socio-economic deprivation being subject to evaluation on statistics that are quite different."

I explained that such a practice could give rise to a constituent in the north of my constituency being assessed on the same basis as somebody in Humberside, while his fellow elector on the south side of the same Stockton street would be subject to the data that apply to claimants in Castle Morpeth in Northumberland, 140 miles away. I said that it was sheer madness, and sheer madness it will remain if such stupid regulations remain in force.

On that occasion the junior Minister said:

"I shall refer later and briefly to the comments made by the hon. Member."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1986; Vol. 89, c. 1385-89.]

Later and briefly it proved to be, right enough. No reference has been made to it from that day to this. I suppose that that is as late and as brief as one can be. I trust that today the Minister will not be guilty of the same oversight. However, we shall see. He has a second chance.

During the same debate I goaded the Minister by referring to the period of seven days beginning on a Monday and ending on the following Sunday. I pointed out that one does not have to be a great mathematician to realise that the definition could refer to an exceptionally cold weather period lasting for 19 days and that effectively it is a way of denying a week's payment to any pensioner who may qualify for it. It could prove to be a mechanism to deprive the elderly of payment for 12 days of suffering in sub-zero temperatures—all for a miserable, penny-pinching £8·57.

The Minister indicated dissent to such an extent on that occasion that I offered him the opportunity to deal with the point. He declined to do so, much to my disappointment and his colleagues' relief. He made no reference to this matter on that occasion. I hope that he will cover the point today. When he does so, perhaps he will bear in mind that the two weather stations covering Cleveland are at the Whitby coastguard and at Leeming. Last week they recorded average temperatures which at Leeming were 0 deg C and at Whitby 0·3 deg C. However, the average for Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Leeming was minus 2·5 deg C and at Whitby minus 2·25 deg C. Thus, if the period runs from Monday to Sunday, it means no help for last week, in spite of the very low temperatures in the last four days of that week.

The announcement yesterday, far from being a gesture of generosity of the Snow Queen, as some of the sycophantic "Torientated" media have described it, was no more than the reinstatement of four days of suffering that would have been filched from our senior citizens by these regulations which the Minister claims, in his own words, were so carefully and skilfully structured. The regulations are a farce. If they were in any way adequate, yesterday's statement would have been unnecessary. In fact, yesterday's announcement, much vaunted by the Prime Minister, was no more than an admission of failure to provide adequately, and the right hon. Lady should admit that.

Notwithstanding facts and figures and well placed guilt, the plain truth is that many people cannot afford to keep themselves sufficiently warm. The sum of £5 a week is clearly insufficient. The Cleveland "elderly at home" team reported to me that some of their clients who have inefficient heating systems have had to use up to four bags of smokeless fuel a week at £7 a bag—this means £28 a week during severe weather. Even with the weekly heating addition which we have heard so much about tonight of £2·20, and the severe weather payment of £5, the single pensioner has to find over £20 a week out of a weekly supplementary pension of £37·90 if he or she is to heat himself or herself adequately. How many Government Members could afford to spend 53 per cent. of their normal weekly income on fuel?

At this point perhaps a comparison with previous circumstances may prove enlightening, for under the old rules anyone receiving supplementary benefit could qualify for a severe weather payment. Under the new rules, only pensioners, children under two and the chronically sick and disabled are entitled to the payment. What about the others? What, for instance, about families with three-year-old to four-year-old children? We have been asked for facts today. Perhaps the House will bear this fact in mind. The highest percentage rise in winter male deaths, as opposed to summer male deaths, occurs in the age range of one to four years. In fact, the 1980 figure indicates that the increase in winter over summer is 151 per cent. So if the children aged nought to five qualify for the age-related

weekly heating additions, what justification is there for excluding the two-year-olds to five-year-olds from the severe weather payments?

I shall listen most carefully for the ministerial response to that question. I shall listen as carefully as I did on Monday last when the Minister said that his Department had deliberately taken the usual budget element allocated for the purpose of severe weather payments and devised a structure of regulations that would disperse the same amount of money more fairly to those who needed such help throughout the country. It is clear that the choice of that approach, coupled with the choice of trigger temperature, was designed not to help the pensioners withstand the cold in their shivering misery, but simply to minimise expenditure and maximise the facade of the Government's pretence at compassion, a form of mendacity which was quite malicious and mischievous in its intent.

If the Government had wanted to be as generous as the Prime Minister now protests, they could have taken a leaf from the pensions book of our tiny neighbour, Guernsey, which was quoted by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) — although he got his facts reversed — where a weekly amount of £12 is paid throughout the winter period in a manner similar to that proposed by Labour Members tonight. In fact, this Channel Island tax haven, this bolt-hole for Brits who seek to avoid or minimise their financial contribution to collective care and concern, has, despite a gulf stream climate measurably more clement than our own, announced yesterday a further weekly payment of £6 for the duration of the present severe weather. Perhaps the Minister will tell us tonight how generous the Snow Queen is now in comparison with our Channel Island neighbour.

Perhaps I may make a point about the comments of the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on nuclear power, to show how specious his contribution was. The reactor at Dungeness B was down this Monday and the reactors at Sizewell, Heysham and Trawsfynydd are now out of commission. According to the Central Electricity Generating Board today, it is because they are undergoing annual maintenance. This is the first time that, as an engineer associated with power stations, I have known of annual outages in January. Incidentally, the Isle of Grain, Ince and Littlebrook power stations produce between them 4,000 MW of oil-fired power which has not been used since the miners' strike. The hon. Gentleman made a specious point and I hope that the House noted that.

The regulations are nothing more than an elaborate attempt at a pathetically opaque confidence trick. Again the Government have ensnared themselves in a web of their own deception and misinformation. The Minister knows it, we know it, and the electorate know it, and they will record that knowledge appropriately when they get the chance to boot this regime out at the next general election.

9.30 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I am bound to say, as a relatively new Member, that I have been amazed to hear Conservative Members pour scorn and vitriol on the Labour party, quote the actions of the last Labour Government and, in one case, even quote from *Tribune*. The Government must face the fact that we have rebutted every accusation with facts, and that they have been in power for seven long years. They cannot continue to evade their responsibilities by throwing vitriol and abuse at the Labour party.

This month, in 1987, some elderly people are living their lives entirely in one room, wrapped up in blankets and several layers of clothing because they cannot afford the cost of heating their whole house. That has been happening not just during this week, but during other weeks too. The Government must accept their responsibility. They have failed to maintain the level of pensions and to provide adequate heating help.

Even before this current spell of cold weather, it was impossible for many families on low incomes to pay for the energy needed to heat their homes. I hope that, once the debate dies down and the Minister thinks about this matter, note will be taken of the points made by Labour Members and, in certain cases, Conservative Back Benchers.

In the short term, during this cold spell, we need more than yesterday's statement, which we all accept. I hope that the measures announced will be extended, irrespective of the precise measurement of the temperature during the next few weeks, until the cold spell ends. I hope that the Government will seriously consider dropping the £500 savings limit. As hon. Members have pointed out, in many places including my constituency, that is the amount saved by old people for their burial. I hope that the Minister will do something about this problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has spelt out a sensible programme for the longer term which we hope the Government will take on board. They must take responsibility for what is happening. I hope that they have listened to our points and will take at least some short-term action to ameliorate the position, or the inevitable consequence of their inaction will be death for many people.

9.33 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): When these debates occur, one is often conscious of the gulf across the Floor of the House — a gulf of experience and understanding.

Mr. Robert Atkins: We understand; Labour does not.

Mrs. Beckett: Every now and again we have a debate like today's, which has not mostly been graced by the presence of the hon. Member for Preston, except when he pops in to make the odd sharp remark.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Lady means the hon. Member for South Ribble.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that correction. I should hate to label any other hon. Member, because of his contribution.

Today's debate is one in which the gulf that is sometimes visible has become a yawning chasm. Opposition Members, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and others too numerous to name, made sensible, valuable contributions and talked about the problems that people are experiencing. They talked about the actual temperatures that people are facing as opposed to the average temperatures experienced

[Mrs. Beckett]

between a Monday and Sunday in a group of weather stations selected so as to ensure that payments are not triggered more than once every five years.

The Government decided, first, that these payments should be made only in a period of severe weather and, secondly, that once every five years was their definition of exceptionally severe. It sometimes seemed that some hon. Members imagined that this was handed down on tablets of stone from Mount Sinai, but that was the definition the Government chose to make.

Some of my hon. Friends have rasied questions about people with prepayment meters who need the money now. They have called on the Government and electricity boards to give clear assurances about disconnections and meeting bills, whether now or in the future. In that context it came ill from the Minister of State to accuse us of scaremongering, particularly when we already know that people are dying under these conditions, but all the more so because, when he was pressed to give assurances about people being given help to meet their bills and about what electricity boards meant by saying that they would deal leniently with people, the best he could come up with was that December was a mild month and perhaps that would help when bills came in at the end of the quarter. That must have done more to strike fear into those concerned about meeting their bills than to give them reassurance.

What we understand it to mean, and what Conservative Members know perfectly well it means, is that the Minister hopes that at the end of the quarter the bills will not be large because of the offset of the mild weather. He has given no assurances about what electricity boards will do regarding disconnections, helping people to meet their bills, or how they will define leniency. If the Minister for Health has a definition of what electricity boards mean by leniency, we will more than welcome hearing it.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), in a remarkable speech, expressed concern for the old and cold, but reminded us all of the severe problems faced by the rich and accused us on this side of the House of living in a fantasy world. The complacency of most of the speeches made by Conservative Members during the debate has been mind-boggling. From the Government side we heard little but congratulation, first, on the Government's record on the matter in general and, secondly, on their flexibility in lifting the conditions which should apply under the severe weather regulations. Lest any hon. Member challenges it, of course we are all pleased that those conditions have been lifted. Inadequate though the scheme may be, we all want the maximum help for the maximum number that can be squeezed out of the Government.

In their relief at the Government having got them off the hook, most Conservative Members seem to have missed the fact that there is a serious flaw at the heart of the Government's case. They have claimed credit for lifting the trigger conditions because, in the Minister of State's own words, this winter is savage and unprecedented or, as the Prime Minister said, the worst for 40 years. If, as the Government claim, the regulations that they insisted on passing before Christmas are sensitive enough to be triggered in conditions which, although exceptionally severe by the Government's definition, are not as bad as today, why are they not sensitive enough for today's even worse conditions?

After all, the Government are not giving more help because the winter is worse. They are not giving more money in any week, never mind for one week. They are not lifting the capital limit of £500. They are not prepared, as in the past, to make payments to the unemployed or to the homeless unless they have a child under two. All the Government are doing is saying that they will definitely give the help that the regulations said they would give anyway.

We must conclude that the Government have decided to lift the trigger conditions because they feared that even in the worst weather for 40 years the condition they set of minus 1·5 deg. C average temperature for seven days from Monday to Sunday might not be met in every part of the country. They are saying that the conditions they set only a month ago are so harsh, so bureaucratic and so unworkable that they dare not let them stand. Only last week the Minister of State, defending the regulations, said that it was too early to judge them. Yesterday, he said that even if the trigger conditions cannot be met, the payment will be made to those who are eligible.

Mr. Major: I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for her typical courtesy in allowing me to intervene.

It is our expectation that the trigger conditions will be met throughout the country. It is precisely because we expected the conditions to be met that we made our announcement yesterday so that the public may be aware of the position in good time. Our concern for people and our expectation that the trigger conditions would be met throughout the country led us to make our announcement yesterday, and I think that that has been welcomed generally.

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister seems to have forgotten that yesterday he said that payments would be made even if the trigger conditions were not met throughout the country. He said that would be done retrospectively, I believe, and—I cannot remember his exact words—that he would fiddle the law afterwards. The Minister said that yesterday, and I suggest that those who doubt me should read the record.

Although the Government's supporters seem not until this moment to have realised it, the Government are admitting by their action what they have not had the guts to admit in words. They are acknowledging, in effect, that the criticism made of the scheme was correct. The Government have not made their concession because they were overcome with compassion. They have not made it because they wanted people to be sure and secure in the knowledge that payments were being made. I heard the Minister on the radio the other morning explaining that the Government had not issued leaflets because they felt that that might encourage people to claim at a time when they would not be eligible to do so. So much for ensuring that the public knew well in advance what they could claim and that they could have security in the knowledge that payments would be made.

As I have said, the Government have not been overcome with compassion. Even they have been able to see that the scheme would be rightly discredited if the trigger conditions were not met in the worst winter for 40 years.

It is right that we should consider the criticisms that have been made of the scheme. Although the conditions of the scheme will not apply this week, they might apply

next week or the week after, and certainly as soon as the Government think that the public's attention has been diverted. If the Government claim that £5 in one week is enough to meet conditions that might occur every five years, it cannot be enough for the worst conditions that have prevailed for 40 years. There should be more money or payments should be made for more weeks.

Some Conservative Members have tried to argue that a winter premium is not needed because heating allowances are paid all the year round. They may not recall that some of the allowances, such as the central heating addition, have already been abolished. That happened quite recently. Even the allowances that have not been abolished were subjected in 1983-84 to a reduction of £1. That reduction was made to the allowances awarded as of right to meet established need. The heating allowances that are paid automatically throughout the year are paid to those who are known to be likely to have extra heating need throughout the year. They are paid to meet existing bills, not to meet the extra need that arises in the winter, and in any winter, let alone the worst winter for 40 years.

No one with more than £500 in the bank will be able to claim under the scheme. The Prime Minister, who I am glad to see in her place, is always talking about the need to save. Someone who was unwise enough to listen to the Prime Minister and to save just enough to pay what is currently the average cost of a funeral will have to choose under this Government between preserving his or her dignity and paying the heating bill.

The Prime Minister referred most misleadingly to the fact that capital limits are higher now than under the previous Labour Government. In real terms there is little difference between capital limits, but there is a substantial difference between funeral costs now and in the days of the Labour Government. The capital limit under the Labour Government was substantially more than would be needed to meet someone's funeral costs.

Some of my hon. Friends have said that many among the most vulnerable, including many on supplementary benefit and those with young children between the ages of two years and five, whose needs are met automatically under the other allowances for which the Government have been claiming credit, are all excluded from the severe weather payments scheme. Of course, those eligible must make a claim.

The system is harsh and unjust and the Government have tacitly admitted that by suspending the harshest conditions. Will they now have the courage of their convictions and withdraw the regulations? The Government should agree to pay a £5 winter premium to vulnerable groups, as my hon. Friends have suggested.

The Government's record on this issue is one of incompetence and neglect, but, most of all, it is one of complacency. Will the Minister tell the House whether, if only out of fear of the electoral consequences, the Government will now at last do what they would not do before Christmas, out of either common sense or sheer Christian charity?

9.46 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): I hope that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the House will understand if I observe rather wryly that, following my transfer in September, I had not anticipated finding myself in this position today. However, I am happy to confront once again the old firm on the Opposition Benches.

Although I shall come fairly speedily to some of the important points raised in the debate in relation to social security issues, I hope that the House will recognise that those issues are by no means the only proper focus of concern about the position of many pensioners and others in such harsh weather. Although those issues are important, I hope that, whatever the House may disagree about, it will accept that it is right for me to say a word or two about our current assessment of some of the problems that have arisen because of the present weather.

Despite the use that has been made of the figures of excess winter deaths and hypothermia by some hon. Members, and especially the use which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made of those figures in a similar debate not many months ago, I do not wish to make purely party points about them. However, there have been echoes in the debate of the hypothermia and excess winter death figures which were used last year in a speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West and also in an intervention by the Leader of the Opposition.

I advise the hon. Member for Oldham, West that his suggestion that those figures have varied by only about 50 over the years is, in relation to winter mentions of hypothermia, straightforwardly wrong. I should like to put the figures that I have on the record. The number of hypothermia mentions on death certificates for those of all ages in the December to April period in 1978-79 was 725. Last winter the figure was down to 634, and in the intervening period it had been between 50 and 100 less than that. Similarly, for those aged 65 and over, the 1978-79 figure was 570. In the milder winters between then and last winter, it was about 350 at the bottom. Last winter the figure was 552, but that was lower than in 1978-79

As I have said, there are difficulties about those figures and I do not want to play games with such a delicate subject. However, any suggestion from Opposition Members that Government policies have contributed to an increase in hypothermia or excess winter deaths is fanciful and far-fetched.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman thinks that that is another success story.

Mr. Newton: Since the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) chooses, with his usual gentleness and tact, to intervene in that way, I should like, without further labouring the point, to give the figures that I have for excess winter mortality over five-year periods. In 1971-75 the figure was 28·2 per cent.; in 1976-80, a period that the Opposition will recognise, it was 33·6 per cent.; and in 1980-85, a period which Conservative Members recognise, it was 29·3 per cent. Let us not hear the Opposition make too much of that.—*[Interruption.]* Having made those points, I am glad to have produced a decent silence on the Opposition Front Bench.

We must recognise that the problem of excess winter deaths rightly concerns everyone in the House. All of us wish to see those figures reduced, as they have been reduced historically over a long period since the war. We want to see the figures brought closer to those of other countries. That has been part of the purpose of the policies we have adopted on the subjects that have been debated today and in a variety of other ways, not least the

[Mr. Newton]

arrangements that are currently being made by health authorities to ensure that some of the inescapable consequences of a period of weather such as this are properly dealt with.

As far as I can judge, the hospital services have been coping very well with the position in which the country finds itself. The majority of hospitals yesterday were still admitting non-urgent cases from their waiting lists. Therefore, the pressure was not such as to warrant the restriction of admissions to emergency cases only. However, that must necessarily be a possibility in some circumstances if the situation continues.

There are some exceptions. I have noted the concern expressed during the debate by some of my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Kent. Certainly in Kent and Lincolnshire some hospitals have had to stop all but emergency work. There are other areas in which patients who have been booked for elective surgery have been unable to travel to hospital. However, the ambulance services — I want to assure the House of this — are following up the urgent cases such as those requiring radiotherapy.

Staff are having difficulty in getting to work in some places. However, nurses, doctors, catering staff and others are sometimes walking many miles to be able to maintain services and some are sleeping overnight at work in order to be there the following morning. I hope that the House will join me in paying tribute to those health workers for what they are doing to maintain services. In some circumstances, the physical conditions are creating great difficulties for the vital services.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West specifically raised an issue concerning the Army and the question of help at Greenwich. We are anxious that every possible help should be given to maintain services. I am advised that the position is that the Woolwich Training Regiment had a free training day and offered its services to Greenwich for snow clearance and other purposes for that day. We know that in some areas the forces are helping out in a variety of ways. For example, in Southend four-wheel drive vehicles are being used to help with emergency services. On the Isle of Sheppey—this will be of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) who raised the matter in the debate — they are ferrying supplies to hospitals. In Essex they are providing transport and drivers for meals on wheels, and in other places they are providing similar services. They are continuing to receive calls for help and will offer as much help as they can. I am sure that that will apply in Greenwich as elsewhere.

Mr. Winnick: We all admire the work being done by hospitals and voluntary services in helping the elderly during this harsh winter. However, does the Minister recognise that the crux of this debate is the fact that so many elderly people will not receive a penny? They may be a few pennies or a pound or two above supplementary benefit level and they will not receive the heating addition or the £5 a week. Why is it that there is always money in Tory Budgets for the rich and prosperous but that when it comes to the poor and needy there are always excuses as to why the money cannot be found?

Mr. Newton: Since the hon. Gentleman clearly wishes to return the debate to the subject on which he has what amounts almost to a fixation, I shall be happy to do that. However, he must recognise that the issue of the exceptionally severe weather premium is only one element of the Government's responsibility to pensioners and the rest of the people of this country.

In view of the time, I shall not elaborate further on what my hon. Friend said about the work that we have been doing. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), for her work with the voluntary organisations in connection with the problems of homeless people that has been welcomed in the House and widely by the voluntary organisations and others.

I assure the House that we shall not let up on those efforts, and we shall continue to support the bodies in every way that we can, and, through our own facilities in the resettlement units, to meet the problems of that group.

I will come to what the hon. Gentleman is obviously concerned that I should talk about and re-emphasise—it is a point that he and others persistently fail to recognise, or, at least, pay proper attention to. The fundamental point made by my hon. Friend the Minister at the start of this debate was that the main means of help with fuel bills to those on supplementary benefit are the scale rates, and the second major means of help are the weekly heating additions which we have greatly extended and improved.

It cannot be said too often that, taken together, those two arrangements mean that any supplementary pensioner householder over 65 years of age is receiving about £8 a week for heating costs each and every week, amounting to over £400 a year. For a supplementary pensioner householder over 85 years of age, the comparable figures are over £11 a week and therefore nearly £600 a year. There is nothing mean or half-hearted about that. It is significantly more generous and goes to significantly more people than anything that any previous Government have done.

As the Social Security Advisory Committee recognised, the arrangements that we have made this year for the additional payments that have been the subject of this debate are a significant advance not only on anything that this Government have been able to do before, but also more than anything that a Labour Government ever tried to do.

It is right again to remind the House that that £5, which so many Opposition Members have talked about as if it were the only help that we were giving to pensioners, is not the only help that we are giving. It means that in any week that it is paid, a supplementary pensioner householder over 85 years of age is receiving about £16 a week for help with fuel bills.

What has amazed me in the course of this debate more than anything else — not least from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) — is the fact that against this background the Opposition's remedy appears to be to go back to the electricity discount scheme of 1977 and 1978, one of the most notorious failures in its field that there has ever been. We hear about bureaucracy and complication. That scheme took a 16-page leaflet, with 48 questions and answers, to explain it. Even then one had to obtain another leaflet to tell the claimant how to claim.

We heard from the right hon. Gentleman some half-explanation about why it was confined to electricity when so many pensioners used other forms of heating. I will tell him the answer from his own leaflet. It says:

"The Government has only limited funds available to help people".

Wait. The best is yet to come. It goes on:

"If other fuels had been included the amount of the discount would have been too small to have been of real help."

I shall tell the House what this has really told us. It has told us that, while everything outside is freezing, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has melted away because he could not bear to listen to the irresponsible speeches of his hon. Friends.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:

The House divided: Ayes 190, Noes 335.

Division No. 52] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Proven)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Monig'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (L'lli)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, Terry (B'ham, H'ge H'l)
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Britan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Durrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael

Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hunt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 332, Noes 185.

Division No. 53] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul

Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Straff'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tim Sainsbury.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*

Brown, Ron (E burgh, Leith)
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim (Heyw'd & M)
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander (Montg'y)
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David (S Shields)
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. (Bristol S)
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank (Stockton North)
Cook, Robin F. (Livingston)
Cox, Thomas (Tooting)
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (L'lli)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, Terry (B'ham, H'ge H'l)
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John (St. Helens N)
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, T. (L'pool Broad Gn)
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. (Norwood)
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James (M'well N)
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart (Vauxhall)
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George (Knowsley, N)
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen N)
Hughes, Roy (Newport East)
Hughes, Sean (Knowsley S)
Hughes, Simon (Southwark)
Hume, John
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry (Alyn & Deeside)
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony (Stretford)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David (Shettleston)
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mitchell, Austin (G't Grimsby)
Morris, Rt Hon A. (W'shawe)
Morris, Rt Hon J. (Aberavon)
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. (Leeds S)
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. (Coventry NW)
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest (Dundee W)
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare (Ladywood)
Short, Mrs R. (W'hampt'n NE)
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. (Isl'ton S & F'bury)
Smith, Rt Hon J. (M'ds E)
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. (W Isles)
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd (Merioneth)
Thompson, J. (Wansbeck)
Thorne, Stan (Preston)
Tinn, James
Wardell, Gareth (Gower)
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David (Bolton SE)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the substantial improvement in the levels of supplementary benefit payments together with the containment of inflation, the extension and improvement of heating additions and the introduction of a statutory entitlement to cold weather payments to assist vulnerable groups; notes that these provisions are all running at record levels; and welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to provide good health and social services to the pensioners of this country.

Industrial Training

10.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): I beg to move,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 8th December, be approved.

The order requires parliamentary approval because one part of it—that covering labour-only subcontracting—involves a levy exceeding 1 per cent. of emoluments. Hon. Members will need no reminding of the importance of the construction industry, which last year accounted for approximately 8 per cent. of gross domestic product. Protecting the skill base of the industry is clearly vital. That is why it is essential that this order should be approved so that money is available to the Construction Industry Training Board to enable it to encourage firms to train in the industry.

The levy proposals are in the same format as those approved by both Houses last year and are expected to raise about £50 million. The levy is made up of three parts. First, there will be an occupational levy on directly employed construction workers in the main industry. A set amount will be raised for each occupation, but this is subject to an overall limit of 1 per cent. of employers' wage bills. The rates vary according to the type of craftsman trained and reflect the training costs of each craft. These rates are in the main the same as last year, but increases are proposed in five areas. These affect less than 10 per cent. of the total directly employed work force in the main industry. These increases are judged necessary to enable the board in particular to increase its contribution to the youth training scheme that it operates on behalf of the industry.

Secondly, with continuing strong support from the industry, the board proposes to retain the 2 per cent. levy on payments made by firms in the main industry for work done by labour only sub-contractors. This rate has remained unchanged since 1981. This reflects the board's continued judgment that labour only sub-contractors, in the main, undertake an inadequate level of training but rely on obtaining skilled manpower trained by other employers. For the sectors covered by those two measures, companies with payrolls of £15,000 or less will not be required to pay levy, and this will exclude about 37 per cent. of all construction firms coming within the board's scope.

Thirdly, for the smaller brick manufacturing sector, the board proposes a rate of 0·05 per cent. of payroll. This is a reduction on last year's rate. All employers with emoluments of £100,000 per annum or less will not be required to pay levy. This is unchanged from last year. These proposals have been unanimously approved by the board and are strongly supported by employer associations in the industry.

Hon. Members will wish to know in particular that the proposals are supported by the Federation of Master Builders, which two years ago expressed concern about the proposed method of calculating levy. At the same time, other employer organisations spoke equally strongly in favour of keeping the current system. The board set up a working party which included the federation to examine this concern and it has agreed that the issue needs to be re-examined when the board can evaluate the financial implications of participating in the new two-year youth training scheme. I am pleased that the industry has been able to come to at least an interim agreement on this matter, which we have always said is one for the industry to resolve. The proposals have the necessary level of consensus support under the Industrial Training Act 1982.

During the year the board has continued to work hard to develop training in the industry. I was pleased that in April the board signed a contract with the Manpower Services Commission for the new two-year YTS. The board currently has some 17,000 young people undergoing training in its YTS, and this is making a central contribution to training in the industry. In addition, the board is piloting practical skills tests for trainees seeking to qualify as building craftsmen. This represents a major step towards the objective of obtaining a more coherent and relevant structure of vocational qualifications, set by our recent White Paper, "Working Together — Education and Training". The board will be playing a leading role in following up the White Paper's recommendations on vocational qualifications.

The House may also be interested to know that I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, yesterday had a very useful meeting about training with senior figures from the industry, including the chairman of the training board. We talked about a number of important issues which the industry needs to face, and the chairman of the board has agreed to produce by Easter an action plan for promoting training in the industry. This underlines the need for the House to support this order, and I commend it to hon. Members.

The proposals have been adopted by the board without opposition. They have support from the majority of employer organisations in the industry and have been approved by the Manpower Services Commission. They are necessary for the board to continue its important work to extend and improve training in the construction industry and to play a significant part in the Government's training initiatives.

10.33 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): First, I should like to confirm that the Opposition support the Order. We congratulate the Construction Industry Training Board on the work that it is doing and has done. We also congratulate the board on its strong commitment, which is a mark of the commitment on both sides of the industry, to training. Both sides demonstrate the strength of the industrial training board system. Perhaps the Minister does not like to hear that. His order is about a 1 per cent. levy, which Conservative Members seem to find amusing. They are derisory about it when it is mentioned in terms of the Opposition statement about the sort of training that we want throughout industry.

In this debate we are discussing the Construction Industry Training Board, and it has a sensible system. It has a commitment to training and imposes a levy on employers to make sure that the training that Britain's construction industry needs is carried out. I put that down as a marker. We support the development of skills testing for the construction trades. There have been teething troubles, but it deserves a cautious welcome, because I am sure that the teething troubles will be overcome.

There has been discussion about whether the 1 per cent. levy should be based on turnover or on sales, but what is

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

important is that the industry should train and that a levy should be imposed. The sad fact is that this is one of the few industries which are left for which the Government have a responsibility to ensure that training is given.

During the next year we hope that the industry will make progress on equal opportunities. I had hoped that the Minister would refer to this. The Manpower Services Commission has taken the initiative, and that is to be welcomed. It should be supported at every level. The trade unions support the move towards equal opportunities. The construction industry has a poor image for equality in race and gender. The CITB ought to adopt a tighter and more co-ordinated approach, and the MSC needs to give an even clearer lead to the CITB and let it know what it must try to achieve.

The Government have a responsibility to underline the importance of equal opportunities to the CITB. Women's groups and the ethnic minorities have lobbied hon. Members. They say that opportunities in the construction industry must be open to all. Far too few women are given the opportunity to train in the traditional construction trades. There is no reason why women should not be good bricklayers, painters and plumbers and become an essential element in the construction industry.

The CITB is not too keen on the suggestion that contract compliance could be used to ensure that equal opportunities are provided for ethnic minorities and women. The Government sometimes ridicule contract compliance, but it has been taken a long way by, surprisingly enough, the MSC. If the managing agent for an MSC scheme, particularly a youth training scheme, does not take seriously the fact that opportunities should be provided for ethnic minorities and women, he runs into real problems.

The MSC has given a lead in contract compliance. The Government cannot parade the MSC before us as the looney Left. Bryan Nicholson is its chairman, and the MSC is carrying out pioneering work. Why should not the Government, local authorities and public enterprises say to those who want to sell their services to them that they will deal only with those companies which train, offer equal opportunities and take seriously their obligations to their employees? That is the question that industrial training boards can advance, and must seek to advance, and the Government have so far ducked that issue. Contract compliance, in terms of a sensible approach to using, in public contract work, proper employers who actually train, who have obligations to their employees, cannot be a bad thing.

There are other issues involved in tonight's order. The wider context of the CITB's work is also very important. In recent years, we have seen a major reduction in construction training. All the fine words that the Minister used this evening cannot disguise the fact that yesterday's meeting between the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, himself and the construction industry was a crisis meeting. It was a meeting of people dreadfully concerned because—surprise, surprise—training in the construction industry is at such an all-time low that if the Government wanted to build more houses, construct more roads, or rebuild sewers they would be unable to do so because there is a national shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry. That is bad enough this week when we are talking about the construction industry, because no matter whether it is a plumber, a bricklayer or an electrician, there is a tremendous shortage of skilled building workers in a nation with nearly 4 million unemployed people, many of them building workers. It is true that many of them are not in the right part of the country at the right time, but the fact is that the meeting yesterday was a crisis one about how we can get trained people in the building and construction industry in a hurry.

One of the problems with the CITB and the levy system as it now works is that the CITB can work only on the basis of what employers say they need at this particular time. The big trouble with the CITB is that it cannot forecast a likely need in, say, two or three years' time for more skilled workers in the building industry, for which we should make plans, because since the present Government came to power in 1979 they have had an appalling record on housebuilding. There has been absolutely no certainty about how many houses and roads there will be and what other construction will take place.

The construction industry has been at an all-time low for the past seven years. In such a situation, employers, the people who decide what training will take place, even under the CITB system or the levy system, do not train.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No, I shall not; I have not finished making my point. The industry does not train, and because it does not train the ITB is unable to train either, or to plan for the future. Here we are in 1987, with a slight sign of an upturn in building, and with no possibility of finding the skilled workers that we need for that change. Even more significant, in a few short months there is likely to be a Labour Government. There will then be an enormous demand for skilled workers in the construction industry, because we will turn our hands to building up our country again, making decent homes for people to live in, having new public investment, and we will inherit, as we always do when we get into government, the apathy and neglect of a Conservative Government, and in this particular respect, the very real problem of training skilled people in the building industry in a very short time.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman has said that there is now less training by firms. Is he aware that at the meeting yesterday, to which he referred — this crisis meeting—a paper submitted by the CITB said that the ratio of trainees to the directly employed work force is now the same as it was in 1976, so there has been no change?

Mr. Sheerman: If the hon. Gentleman would take the time to talk to CITB officials, as I do regularly, he would know that not only has the proportion declined over the years, but that the number of people being trained has dropped dramatically. In 1979 there were not an enormous number of YTS trainees. As the Under-Secretary of State knows, I am not against youth training. This is not skills training, but a possible introduction to skills training. The ratio of trainees to those who finish their apprenticeship is well down on 1979. As I understand from yesterday's meeting, the CITB said that if it was given resources, had genuine leadership from the Government and the Government said, "Go, boy, go for it", training under the CITB could be increased by 25 per cent. But there will not

be a 25 per cent. increase in training in the short term, because the Government do not have the courage to show leadership in expanding training.

It is not just a matter of the CITB having a crisis meeting with the Government. The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) admitted that it was a crisis meeting.

Mr. Thurnham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I referred to a meeting yesterday, not to a crisis meeting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): That is not a point of order.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman can read *Hansard* in the morning to see what he said, unless he does some nifty footwork.

It is bad enough that there are not skilled workers over the length and breadth of the country to start the task of rebuilding it, but only six days ago the Engineering Industry Training Board—the central training board for manufacturing industry—said that there was a crisis in training and an appalling level of skills at every stage of the engineering industry. Every industry is bedevilled by the Government's lack of concern for and neglect of training. Our work force is less trained and less skilled than ever before, and less trained and less skilled than that of any of our international competitors. All that was glossed over by the Under-Secretary of State, who said little about training costs.

A much more important matter is the continuing uncertainty about what work will be available. If employers are uncertain about the industry's future workload, they will not train. They have not done so and they will not do so in the future. There are significant skill shortages across the board and large numbers of building workers—an estimated 450,000 or more—are out of work. Perhaps a Conservative Member will ask: if there are 450,000 workers out there, why do they not suddenly come on stream? The reason is that skills are not like investments in a bank which are conveniently there for use on demand. Skills rust and decay. If a building worker is on the dole for a few months and then a few years, he needs retraining and upgrading. Many of the highly skilled people in the construction industry who have been out of work for a long time now, tragically need retraining.

That brings me to a point that the Minister skated over niftily. We still do not have under this Government or under the CITB an adequate mechanism for dealing with labour-only contractors. Whether the levy is doubled or not, labour-only contractors do not train. I have not seen any mechanism under the ITB, under the Government's legislation or under the MSC's intervention to deal effectively with that enormous percentage of the industry that does not train and evades its responsibility to the work force.

It has been estimated in recent months that the major social and economic needs of the country could be met through new construction. Even on a conservative scale it is estimated that we could spend £20 billion on the repair and maintenance of local authority homes, £2 billion on the repair and maintenance of hospitals, £4 billion on roads and so on. To put it in perspctive, the total value of construction activity at the moment is only £23 billion. We could have a new building programme, under a decent Government, that would take us to a £28 billion investment in the future of our people. Tens of thousands of people could go back to work in construction. Rather than spending the whole of our North sea oil inheritance on the dole queue, we could have invested that money in new homes, new roads, new sewers and new hospitals. Under this Government we see that money being wasted and the skills of the people who could have produced that new development decaying.

Three ingredients are missing. The first, of course, is a Labour Government. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like that prospect, but they will meet it soon. The second is a commitment from a Government who have closed their eyes to the opportunity to get people back to work at a low cost to build th ngs that are needed. Thirdly, the Government should ensure—the record of the Minister on this is disgraceful—that the unemployed have sufficient skills to produce the products that people want.

Here we see one of the deficiencies of the ITB system,. I am a great defender of the industrial training board system, but the boards have to be expanded. We do not say that everything that ITBs traditionally did was wonderful. We should not just restore them, but would improve them. We would learn from experience to make them even more efficient. Within the present structure, industries find the training remit too confining. They could do much more. That is what the EITB said last week and what the CITB is saying to the Minister at present.

ITBs cover only a meagre 25 per cent. of employees in British industry. Because they are not effectively linked to an economic and employment strategy, they cannot easily meet the challenges of training. What is missing from the Govermnment's policy is a link between a strategy for economic development and growth. As they set an objective of a target for growth, whether in house construction, public service construction or hospital building, they should at the same time plan—a word which the Minister and the Government do not like to hear—the construction targets and the training to go with it. Unfortunately, the Government are frightened to plan construction and the economy. They are incapable of planning the training of the British work force and all that that entails.

A Labour Government would set the challenges of generating economic growth and getting people back to work. Such a Government would plan for their training, and that is something that the present Government will never do. We have seen this with the EITB and the CITB, the two major training boards that still remain. I fear to think what is happening in the rest of British industry where industrial training boards were thrown away, where they were wasted.

Under a Labour Government there will be a commitment to link training with a strategy to get people back to work. We shall bring them back to build our homes and to rebuild houses and our infrastructure. We shall encourage the stability and continuity of growth in the industry. That will make training a sane possibility.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: I am bringing my remarks to a conclusion. If the hon. Gentleman is able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be able to make his contribution to the debate.

[Mr. Sheerman]

I am sure that the ITBs want to encourage and see occur the decasualisation of construction employment, and that will happen under a Labour Government. We shall tackle the problem of labour-only supply. That is the effective way of getting the amount of training that we need by the community as well as by the industry. We shall move towards a more regular employment structure throughout the construction industry.

The Government must take responsibility for training. So far they have denied that responsibility and we have seen the end of industrial training as we used to know it, along with skills training. Nothing that the Government have done has fooled the British public into believing that the highly skilled men and women whom we need to compete in international markets and to meet the challenge of technology have been trained under their stewardship. The Opposition support the order, but we must use this occasion to point out that industrial training has been left to go to rack and ruin.

10.58 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Having listened to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I am surprised that he did not suggest that there should be an industrial training board for Opposition spokesmen. I should think that the electorate will continue to ensure that the Labour party remains the missing ingredient in the mixture that has been advanced in all the hot air that has been generated this evening.

I support the order, although it is not on every occasion that an employer wishes to support a levy on his operations. The characteristics of the construction industry, however, support the need for a collective training organisation. I pay tribute to the good work that is done by the Construction Industry Training Board. As a member of the Electrical Contractors Association, I should like to say how much the employers welcome the way in which the board has co-operated with all the training arrangements which have been made.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Huddersfield to a characteristic of the electrical contracting industry's training arrangements. The fact is that many more apprentices were taken on once the high starting rates for apprentices had been reduced to levels more comparable with those that prevail on the continent. The present starting rate is 22·5 per cent. of the adult craft rate, which enables employers to pay for training in a way that they seem unable to manage in other parts of the construction industry. If the hon. Gentleman feels that there is a lack of training, I suggest that the high starting rates which have been imposed by union agreements in the past must be one of the reasons.

The hon. Gentleman did not seem to appreciate the argument advanced by the CITB that an average of 9·5 per cent., as a ratio of trainees to the directly employed work force, has prevailed from 1976 to 1985. Therefore, when the hon. Gentleman says that the ratios have changed, he is not looking at the figures.

There are two points of concern. One is shoddy work. I was appalled to read that the Department of the Environment had received 42,000 complaints of shoddy work. I am sure that one way of overcoming that is to ensure that there are skill tests for those who undergo training in the industry. I hope that the pilot work taking place at present will lead to skill tests for all branches of the industry, as has been done in the electrical contracting industry for some years.

The suggestion that there should be a kite mark to tackle cowboys may well help to reduce the vulnerability of the public to shoddy workmanship. I hope that that idea is successfully developed.

I should like to deal with what the hon. Member for Huddersfield called the problem of labour-only sub-contractors. It is unfortunate that he was not able to visit Japan last year with the Select Committee on Employment and learn some of the different ways in which the industry there is organised and the training methods that are used. As far as I am aware, there is no great crisis in the construction industry in Japan, although many firms have 100 per cent. arrangements for labour-only subcontracting. It is instructive to know that people in Japan still look on some matters as we do here. The Japanese Ministry of Labour's book on human resources development said:

"In Japan, however, skilled workers are still socially underestimated. Because of excessive importance attached to academic background, they do not yet enjoy an established social position."

Therefore it seems that we have the same problems in both countries.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister visited Japan in May. Looking at his itinerary, I know that he did not have the time to talk to people in the construction industry. Perhaps next time he goes he might be able to do so. I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General had to be called back so suddenly from Japan because of the confused ideas on the Opposition Benches as to exactly what debate we were going to have today. Had they been able to make up their mind at a proper time, my right hon. and learned Friend would have been able to continue his visit.

I should like to mention to the hon. Member for Huddersfield a typical Japanese company — Kokko Shisetsu Kogyo Company Ltd. The president is an excellent gentleman. His name is Hiroshi Sakanishi. He told me that the turnover of his firm was a figure in yen equivalent to £10 million a year. However, he employed only 80 people. That ratio would be out of proportion for any electrical contractor in this country. However, he said that, in addition, up to about 300 people worked for his firm on a self-employed basis, working in small groups of five, 10 or perhaps more on a labour-only subcontracted basis. Although he is a leading electrical contractor in Japan he does not employ any electricians at all. We should look at that example and see——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating an order that is concerned with the levy and the purpose of it. He should relate his remarks to that.

Mr. Thurnham: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are talking about a 2 per cent. levy for the labour-only element. It is because of that 2 per cent. that we are having to address the matter tonight. I should like to draw attention to the fact that it should be seen not as a problem but as an opportunity for more flexible working practices to be introduced into the industry, as long as the measures that are carried out for training in Japan are looked at closely by the CITB as a model for what can be done in this country. I recommend the CITB to pay close attention to the way in which licences are issued to skilled operatives

in Japan as an incentive for people to undertake training with the provision of loans for training costs from the Government.

I believe that we can learn considerably by looking at other countries — for example, Germany, where four times as many apprentices are employed because of a much lower starting rate of pay.

11.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I support the order inasmuch as it provides for the continuance of training by the Construction Industry Training Board, but I have one or two questions to which I hope the Minister will have time to reply.

The industry, according to my information, perceives itself as having problems. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) referred to a "crisis meeting". Whether or not that is the case, it is clear that, first, the amount of training is directly related to confidence and optimism in the industry and, secondly, that various figures seem to be bandied about. The proportion of the work force in the industry engaged in training at any given time has fallen over the past six or seven years. If that is in dispute, perhaps the Minister can clarify the situation, because there is no point in arguing over spurious statistics. It seems to me that that is maintained by the board itself to be part of its problem.

I want to take up the comments of the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), because I notice that the Construction Industry Training Board points to the increase in the number of self-employed in the industry as a problem. I do not believe that the Minister would regard the increased number of self-employed as a problem. I certainly do not regard it as a problem in the sense that we should not welcome it. The problem is how we absorb them into the mainstream of the training activity. If I am right in my presumption, part of the way of getting them to contribute is to go for the 2 per cent. levy, which is why we are having this debate.

I do not accept the presumption that people who are small by definition—self-employed, labour-only contractors — even if they do not directly contribute to the training process in the terms of the training that they do, are not a proper and legitimate component of the industry.

I have watched the oil industry in my area and the way that it has developed, with a number of sub-contractors. The big companies tend to do the bulk of the training, which spins off into the foundations of smaller companies which still feed back into the industry. I am not objecting to the point of the levy; I am simply saying that I hope we do not get into a bureaucratic way of restricting the flexibility within the industry so that we discourage flexible developments.

The Government have got themselves into a slight bind, because they have come forward with an order fully endorsed by the industry and fully backed by the MSC, which basically is saying, "We have a training board that imposes a levy. It is working well and we want an order to support it." Yet it is the same Government who disbanded the training boards.

According to the Minister:

"Training has improved significantly since the demise of the 16 industrial training boards."

I have been unable to find any evidence to support that. If that sort of statement is made by a Minister, it requires proof and support.

Mr. Trippier: I would not dare to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is taking my words out of context, but, if he studies *Hansard* and reads the various exchanges at Question Times, he will discover that I have made it clear that I have undertaken an investigation into the work of the non-statutory training organisations. I have informed the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) of that and am awaiting the result.

Mr. Bruce: I accept what the Minister says, but we need the evidence to substantiate that statement. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to substantiate it.

There is a widespread view that the Government have substantially dismantled training organisations for reasons which, if one were fair-minded, one would say might or might not be justified, but they certainly have not convinced people that what has been put in their place is adequate or will enable us to cope with our existing problems, never mind the challenges of the future.

In that context, the Government are saying in the order that the Construction Industry Training Board effectively wishes to extend its existing functions, and they ask the House to support it. In principle, of course, there is support from both sides of the House. However, let me ask a few pertinent questions.

If the Government support the order, it behoves them at least to explain the continuation of the levy. I think that I know the answer. The board currently has reserves of £73·5 million, and, if I heard the Minister correctly, the continuation of the levy is likely to yield something in excess of £50 million in the current year. Is the Minister satisfied that that is the kind of money that the industry needs and that it will be sensibly and intelligently spent, rather than it being just a matter of, "That is what we have been getting for the last few years, so let us carry it through."? It is important that that should be justified. I am not suggesting that it is not, but it should be explained.

It is reasonable to ask the Government to explain how they satisfy themselves that the work of a board, for which Parliament has to approve the levy, is being conducted fully and satisfactorily. I am not suggesting that it is not. All the comments from other speakers shows a general satisfaction with the board. However, I should be interested to know how the Government go about satisfying themselves that a levy is justified, both in terms of reserves available, and the proposals to go with it.

It would be helpful if the Government would say how the labour-only contractors have been affected by the 2 per cent. levy. I understand the reason behind it, but is there an effect in terms of their trying to evade it, because, after all, at that end of the market there are ways of getting round such things, and, given the extra levy that they are being asked to pay, are they getting a perceived benefit at the end of the day? I would be prepared to accept that their perceived benefit is their ability to recruit trained people from larger companies. That is the way that it tends to work. I do not regard that as an unobjectionable argument, but it is right that it should be explained and justified.

Over the past two or three years we have experienced a depression in the construction industry that has clearly had an effect on training within that industry. We have had a general debate on the importance and merits of training. We have, I think, acknowledged that the amount of training that goes on is directly related to activity.

[Mr. Bruce]

Therefore, it is important that the Government should recognise that they need to instil confidence within the industry if they are to get training moving.

Anything that the Government can do over and above the order to stimulate and to instil confidence in the construction industry will provide the framework wherein the levy will produce the trained people who, regardless of who wins the next election—I hope that the Minister believes this—will be necessary.

Britain wants to see some investment in our infrastructure and in the quality of our housing stock. That must be confronted and we need trained people in industry to do the job. To the extent that the order will contribute to that, I welcome it, but I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that I have asked some pertinent questions which he should answer.

11.13 pm

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will by now be bathing in a rosy glow of satisfaction, having heard plaudit for his order from Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, it is almost churlish of me to enter a minor note of dissent and anxiety about some aspects of the order.

Were I my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary I would be rather worried about the order because, listening carefully to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), this sort of order is but one brick to the foundations of the centralised planning for which the hon. Gentleman so wonderfully looks.

On the macro level and almost going off at a tangent, if the hon. Gentleman is so concerned and regards centralised planning as such a key factor in the regeneration of the nation, he should go for a few months to countries behind the iron curtain, as my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and I have done recently, and he will see the effect of that centralised planning.

On the micro level, I am rather concerned about how the order will relate to small firms within the construction industry. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take account of those worries in any future consideration of the issues.

The construction industry is dominated by a plethora of small firms. I accept that, as a group, small firms receive a large amount of assistance with training. Some of the small firms are unable to take advantage of the Construction Industry Training Board's facilities but are, nevertheless, required to pay the levy.

For some time the exemption limit has been set at £15,000 of payroll. In effect, that means a firm with, at most, three employees. The order maintains that exemption level. Every firm that has more than three employees must pay the levy. For many small firms—my hon. Friend is the Minister with responsibility for small firms—that represents a considerable financial burden. If those firms received their money's worth from that levy, it would not be a burden, but, in many cases, they do not.

At this stage, I must enter a caveat. Many representations that I have received about the order have come from a small firm of civil engineering contractors. However, my inquiries suggest that those problems are common to many other similar companies, especially in the north of England.

Such small firms are seldom able to allow staff time off for off-site training. In today's competitive climate such firms cannot afford to carry surplus staff. They need to be able to react to an extremely competitive market place. Even with grant aid, the course fees and other associated costs can make the training offered by the CITB almost prohibitive. Courses cannot always be specifically designed to the needs of particular firms. Even courses held at local colleges, for which grant aid may be available, are not necessarily relevant to the firms' specific work. When appropriate courses are available they are often held too far way. The firm in Halifax—which has made representations to me—is aware of a relevant course that is held in Norfolk. That is too far away.

When operatives have been trained and have obtained a new qualification, they often move to a larger firm where they receive higher wages. Thus, the small firm pays the levy and takes advantage of the training facilities but the trained staff go off to other employers.

If one considers the global figures, small firms may represent a high proportion of the grant take-up. That tendency relates specifically to building firms, not to civil engineering firms or other disciplines.

Mr. Sheerman: What is the name of the firm in Halifax?

Mr. Galley: It is not right for the hon. Gentleman to make a comment from a sedentary position, and I am not prepared to name a firm because I am dealing with principles rather than individual firms.

Mr. Sheerman: It does not exist.

Mr. Galley: It is quite wrong for the hon. Member for Huddersfield to make a comment from a sedentary position, and it is wrong to impugn my honour and integrity.

Mr. Sheerman *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is this a point of order.

Mr. Sheerman: I wish to apologise to the hon. Member for Halifax if he thought that I was impugning his honour. I merely think that it is suspicious that he cannot name the firm that is having such terrible troubles.

Mr. Galley: It would be wrong and invidious to name a particular firm. I have consulted more than one firm. The hon. Member for Huddersfield was impugning my honour because he suggested that the firm does not exist. It jolly well does, and it will be deeply concerned about the hon. Gentleman's comments.

In some sectors of the construction industry it may be that the large firms are receiving a disproportionate share of the benefits while small firms pay a disproportionate share of the levy. In smaller companies the emphasis is often placed on on-site training, but they may then lose experienced staff to the larger companies. As a result, small companies may be given no recognition of the contribution that they make to on-site training. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Huddersfield has again impugned my honour from a sedentary position, and is quite wrong.

My hon. Friend the Minister may well say that the levy arrangements are subject to consultation with the industry, but the evidence seems to be that many of the representative bodies are, of necessity, dominated by the large firms, and that the smaller firms have a relatively small voice in those consultations. In specific sectors there

is, therefore, some evidence of small businesses being treated unfairly. However, there are ways of mitigating that.

I am very disappointed that the order does not address itself to those problems. The Engineering Industry Training Board excludes from any levy all those firms with fewer than 40 employees. Such a blanket exemption may not be appropriate for the construction industry, but it is surely possible to have two or three grades of payment, whether devised on a pay roll or number of employees basis. It may be possible to say that people with 10 to 20 employees will pay one rate while those with more than 20 employees pay another. Alternatively, the Construction Industry Training Board is very much taken with the idea of the pay roll, and so one could say that firms with pay rolls of £15,000 to £30,000 should pay one levy while those with bigger pay rolls pay another.

The order makes special provision for certain groups, with particular reference to brick manufacturers. Similar arrangements could be made for other specific sectors of the construction industry that do not fully benefit at present. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will note the concerns of small firms when making any future arrangements for the Construction Industry Training Board.

11.21 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I shall make a brief speech. I am delighted to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General in the Chamber, fresh back from Japan in order to hear this important debate.

I have no direct experience of the construction industry, but I have experience of training boards and of filling in the necessary forms for them, with all the bureaucracy that is involved. Indeed, I take on board the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) about the effect that the order may have on small firms. I fully endorse the remarks made about the national shortage of skilled workers. I realise that we must ensure that more and more people can pursue the various necessary crafts and professions if we are to maintain our export drive and remain a competitive nation.

The training boards were launched in the 1970s with every good intention, particularly with regard to matching the training programmes being introduced by other countries, such as West Germany. We had only to consider the number of apprentices and training courses that those countries had in place to know that we came out very badly. Mention has already been made of the trade union rates being applied to apprenticeships in Britain compared with the situation in West Germany. British employers were consequently reluctant to take on unskilled youngsters at such high rates.

However, the bureaucracy often escalated to match the activities of those training boards and that hit small firms. They started to rebel against all the form filling. Often the levy grant system turned out to be just a recycling process with no real influence on the level of training to be provided for those working in those companies. Many small firms endured that, along with all the other centralised taxes, such as rates and national insurance, and just added the training board levies to those figures. We must ask what effectiveness is being achieved by our training boards in providing the skills and expertise that we need for the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax and others have made the point that training is carried out by large firms. They produce the skilled people who take the more senior managerial positions within industry.

Although I shall support the order, I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to consider whether the £15,000 exemption level will be too low in future and whether it should be considerably higher. Small firms cannot effectively carry out training if they are levied at above £15,000. It must be a considerably higher figure. They do not have the management time to devote to training and they do not have time to send their young trainees on courses. They do not get contracts that produce the necessary revenue for them to finance young apprentices or trainees on day release and other courses.

When the measure comes before the House in a year or so, I urge the Minister to consider raising the exemption level to a considerably higher figure than £15,000, to give small firms relief from the bureaucratic form-filling involved and, possibly, give large firms the opportunity to carry out the training schemes that will be necessary for the industry in future.

11.26 pm

Mr. Trippier: This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) in welcoming the presence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General, who, due to the stupidity of Her Majesty's Opposition, has had his essential visit to Japan curtailed. We all regret that fact, but are delighted to see him.

The CITB will welcome the complimentary remarks made by hon. Members. Obviously, I wholly endorse them. I was sorry to hear the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), in his initial address, refer to the proposed 1 per cent. levy which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) suggested, perhaps not with the total agreement of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). In fact, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield has heard me say in the past, the Department of Employment has calculated that, if this were to be applied across industry and commerce, it would lead to an increase of about 15 percentage points in corporation tax.

Mr. Sheerman: It would not.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman seems to doubt the statisticians in the Department of Employment. These are not politicians' figures. The prospect of such a levy being imposed on the industry would fill the hearts and minds of the employers represented on the CITB with absolute terror. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was prepared to admit, there are people operating in small business—which he supports, as I do—who are taking a risk. The construction business is a more risk-taking one than many others that we might think of. It is vital for us all to recognise that those who are prepared to take risks should not be over-regulated and over-penalised by increases in corporation tax or in direct taxation. Government Members totally disagree with the hon. Members for Huddersfield and, dare I say it, for Gordon on this and similar issues.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield made a point about equal opportunities. I agree wholeheartedly with what he

[Mr. Trippier]

said, with the exception of the point that he made about contract compliance. I had a meeting with members of the CITB in the Department of Employment about progress on equal opportunities. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out that it appears that we have a problem in the construction industry. But he was a little unfair to suggest that only the MSC, with the construction industry and the CITB, was taking the lead because both my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and I have played an active role and are anxious that this type of initiative should develop. I am glad that we shall enjoy the hon. Gentleman's support. It is right to pursue the initiative, and we are intent on doing that.

It is important that the House should know that the CITB could not be recognised as an approved training organisation for YTS unless it complied with a new mandate being given by the MSC which also emanated from the meeting in the Department in September.

I did not agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about contract compliance. The employers' representatives on the CITB would run a mile from contract compliance. The hon. Gentleman should see some of the mail that I receive on this issue from employers in the industry who must comply with the regulatory paperwork introduced by some Left-wing head bangers in local authorities, especially in London and the south-east. If they have to dance to the tune of that sort of regulation —they are prepared to do that because they need to work—they are prohibited from getting on with the job that they do best, which is creating wealth and work. I could not wait to hear what the CITB would say about contract compliance, but I was certain that there would be nothing unanimous about its decision.

Mr. Sheerman: What is the difference between the sort of contract compliance that the MSC under Bryan Nicolson is introducing for recognised approved trainers under YTS and what the Minister constantly refers to as that of head bangers and the loony Left? He knows that exactly the same is going on in contract compliance in terms of ethnic minorities, equal opportunities and the employment of women. He knows as well as I do that the CITB has swallowed what for some employers was a bitter pill in terms of the MSC's demands for contract compliance. What is the difference between that and what local authorities demand?

Mr. Trippier: There is a great difference. If the hon. Gentleman has taken the time and trouble to study the documents sent out by local authorities, he will realise that it is madness for authorities to issue them because of the problems that must be tackled by employers. We are talking principally about a problem with regard to YTS. If I could just have the hon. Gentleman's attention for a moment, he will find that we have another point of agreement.

Our concern is with YTS in particular. The CITB should be proud that it has a higher number of YTS trainees than any other sector in industry generally. That is fine. We have detected a problem, and one does not have to be clever or a genius to see that few coloured people appear to be taken on by the industry. If that point will unite the Opposition with the Government, I welcome it. Certainly, the CITB has undoubtedly taken that point firmly on board.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a meeting yesterday with the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction and me as a crisis meeting. It was called some months ago by my hon. Friend the Minister. I reached the same conclusions as he reached, but from an entirely different route—a report issued by the Federation of Master Builders. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State thought that it was rather quizzical that we identified several skill shortages—about 4,000—yet we had an unacceptably high level of unemployment. *[Interruption.]* With respect, I am about to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Sheerman: If yesterday's meeting was not a crisis meeting and the Government had for some time recognised severe skill shortages in the construction industry, why have they waited since September to have a meeting to talk about them? That is a dereliction of duty if ever I heard one.

Mr. Trippier: I do not think so. The hon. Gentleman ought to do his homework a little more carefully. He does not seem to appreciate that the CITB has considerable reserves of money. He did not mention that and I do not think that he even knows about it. That helps to answer one of the questions asked by the hon. Member for Gordon in his intervention. We drew the attention of the CITB to this problem because we knew that it had reserves which we thought could be better spent. The hon. Member for Huddersfield cannot have it both ways. On the one hand, he says that he wants to see a replication of statutory training boards right across Britain in different sectors. On the other hand, here is a training board which is not meeting a specific shortage—the shortage of skill.

Yesterday's meeting was not a crisis meeting. We wanted it to be properly prepared. We wanted the trade unions to be properly represented—which they were—and we wanted to see the representatives and leaders of industry from various trade associations. It was a most constructive meeting, and, as a result of it, we have asked the CITB to come back to us by the end of March with a specific proposal to deal with the skill shortage which I have already said will be about 4,000 apprenticeships. I have no doubt that the board's response will be positive.

The hon. Members for Huddersfield and for Gordon were wrong when they said that the number of people being trained in the industry was falling. Between 1985 and 1986 there was an increase of 2,000 apprenticeships in the industry. The number of YTS trainees was also on the increase. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about 1985 to 1986. Certainly, there have been ups and downs, but it is unfair to say that the figure is still going down, because it has increased.

As I have said, between 1985 and 1986 there was an increase of 2,000 apprenticeships in the industry. Given that the shortage is 4,000, I do not believe, nor does the CITB, that the problem is insurmountable. We are spending £1·5 billion annually on training—more than double the amount that was being spent when we took office. It is grossly unfair for the hon. Member for Huddersfield to suggest to the House that we are not taking a lead in training. I have already said how we are doing that with the CITB in two specific areas. We are convinced that the CITB, however good a job it is doing at the moment, could do much more by encouraging employers to regard training as an investment and not as a cost.

I listened carefully to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who spoke about the skill tests. He may be interested to hear that at yesterday's meeting one of the employers' representatives talked about quality assurance—a point which my hon. Friend touched upon in his speech. I agree with him that quality assurance needs careful study. I hope that by March, when the CITB is to come forward with the other proposals that I mentioned, it will also deal in some detail with how quality assurance can be improved.

The CITB is also to report on the labour-only subcontracting problem, about which my hon. Friend spoke. I have no doubt that the CITB will read with interest his contribution to this debate.

I have answered the first question put to me by the hon. Member for Gordon. He made a fair point when he spoke about the self-employed, but it is incorrect to suggest that people who are exempt from paying the levy cannot receive grants from the CITB. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) got that a little wrong. It is wrong and it is important for me to put it right. Of course, there are exemptions for those who have a payroll of under £15,000, but they can certainly enjoy the training facilities available for employers and employees, although it would be principally those who are self-employed who would use those facilities, either locally and organised by the CITB or through distance learning modules. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax did not mention that, but it holds the key to the problem that he identified. They can also use open learning generally for which the Manpower Services Commission is responsible. It was again raised at the meeting yesterday afternoon and we all agreed — the Government, unions and the employers' organisations — that this must be the way forward. Distance learning and open learning should be developed and strengthened.

Mr. Galley: Even with open learning and distance learning, is my hon. Friend able to guarantee that the facilities that will be made available will be relevant to firms throughout the industry, including civil engineering? I do not see how he can give such a guarantee.

Mr. Trippier: I have to be careful how I answer my hon. Friend, because he has asked for a 100 per cent. guarantee. My hon. Friend said that for a firm in his constituency the specific kind of training that was required was available only at the other end of the country. The only answer to that problem is distance learning, and it can be provided relatively cheaply. If that need is not being met, I should like to discuss with the CITB and the MSC how it could be met, and I shall do everything in my power to try to put it right.

The hon. Member for Gordon asked me how the Government monitor the spending of the CITB. Initially, it is monitored by MSC officials, the Department and Ministers. I do not suggest that the CITB has been irresponsible, but the CITB's spending led to the meetings to which I referred earlier. We are anxious to get the extra value for money to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Members for Gordon and for Huddersfield referred to the depression in the industry. The Labour, Liberal and the Social Democratic parties have a vested interest in trying to paint as black a picture as they can, but output in the construction industry has grown steadily since 1981. In 1985 it was 11 per cent. above the 1981 level, and 1986 promises to be the fifth successive year in which output in the industry has grown. It will be the first time that that has happened since the 1960s. In the first nine months of the year, output was nearly 3 per cent. higher than in the same period in 1985. It is particularly encouraging that the growth was led by the private sector. Private industrial and commercial output in 1985 was the highest for 14 years and the second highest ever. In the first nine months of 1986 private commercial output was at the highest level ever—up by 12 per cent. over the same period a year ago.

It has been claimed again tonight that the Government should spend more on the infrastructure to help to create additional jobs in the industry. The Government are aware of the need for spending on the infrastructure and they will direct whatever resources can be afforded to those areas that the public sector can tackle. In the autumn statement the Government were able to increase the provision for capital expenditure on construction by nearly £1 billion and they have provided £450 million for housing. That illustrates the support that the Government are giving to the industry and to training in the industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1987, which was laid before this House on 8th December, be approved.

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Sir Humphrey Atkins be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Mr. Michael Mates be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Mr. Alexander Ogorodnikov

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

11.43 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): During the whole of Advent, from 30 November until Christmas eve, Athanasius Hart, an iconographer and lay reader in the Orthodox Church, lived in a tiny cage in St. Sepulchre's church in London. He was on a complete fast. He was attempting to draw the attention of the world to the plight of Alexander Ogorodnikov, imprisoned in a Soviet prison camp since 1978 for founding and running a Christian discussion group.

On 16 December, along with my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess), and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I went to St. Sepulchre's church to take part in a lunchtime Bible reading and thereby show my support for Mr. Hart's action and for Alexander Ogorodnikov. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) drew the attention of the House to the case of Alexander on 15 December, and tonight I welcome the opportunity to reinforce what he said then in this Adjournment debate.

Alexander Ogorodnikov, who is 36, grew up in an atheist family. His interest in Christianity began when he saw the film "The Gospel According to St. Matthew." In 1973, soon after his conversion, he was expelled from the Cinematograph Institute in Moscow at which he was studying, despite obtaining excellent marks. His persecution had begun. He wished to learn more about his faith and share it with others, so he organised, with like-minded Christians, a discussion and study group, the Christian Seminar. It was an informal gathering of friends, which met in private, without seeking publicity for its activities. Despite this, members of the group started to attract the attention of the authorities. Alexander himself experienced difficulties both at work and in private life. He was dismissed from a variety of menial jobs and forced to move house. Two other members of the seminar were incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals, and 31 members were interrogated, searched and pressurised.

The seminar continued to meet. The members had lectures and discussions on theology, theosophy, sociology, philosophy and the history of religion. On 20 November 1978 Alexander was arrested on charges of parasitism—it is illegal to be out of work in the Soviet Union—even though he was on his way to an interview at the time. He was tried and sentenced in January 1979. He was not allowed to call defence witnesses, and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and sent to a labour camp. In transit he was beaten up when he asked to see a priest.

In September 1980 Alexander was tried on charges of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, for publishing and publicising the seminar's official journal. He was sentenced to six years in a strict regime labour camp, followed by five years' internal exile. In January 1981 he began a hunger strike to protest about the taking away of his Bible. His attempts to have his Bible returned were unsuccessful. He was particularly harshly treated in prison. He was forbidden to pray and his cross was torn from around his neck on numerous occasions. In six years he spent a total of 659 days in protest hunger strikes to back up his demands for the return of his Bible, 411 days in the camp's internal prison and three days in the severe conditions of the punishment cell.

From December 1983 until February 1984 he was in a cell, the walls of which were entirely covered with ice, and on one occasion his cell was deliberately flooded with sewage. In November 1985, when he was due to complete the camp part of his sentence and go into internal exile, he was rearrested in camp, charged with violating camp discipline and re-sentenced.

He is in a desperate condition, having lost all his teeth and become almost blind. In eight years his wife has been allowed only one visit. In a letter to his mother, he pleaded that she appeal to the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet to show him a measure of mercy by ordering his execution by firing squad, thus putting an end to the prospect of a lifelong, painfully slow torture by deprivation of living conditions fit for a human being, by imprisonment in punishment cells, by humiliations, by beatings, by a total lack of rights.

One of the worst aspects of his imprisonment was the feeling that he was alone. He could not draw comfort from the knowledge that Christians in Russia and in the West knew about him and were working and praying for his release, because news did not reach him. Thankfully, as a result of the growing, worldwide interest, the signing of petitions, letters to the Soviet authorities and the efforts of Athanasius Hart, Alexander was, around Christmas time, allowed a visit from his mother and from a priest, who was able to give him holy communion.

We are grateful to the Soviet authorities for allowing those visits, but this courageous man, who is setting such a splendid example to those of us who are free to practise our religion and who often take our freedom for granted, needs our continued support. His treatment and the reasons why he received it clearly contravene not only the Helsinki agreement on human rights but Soviet law. We must continue to press for his release and also draw attention to his many fellow countrymen who are facing similar difficulties.

11.50 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate. I congratulate my good friend the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on his speech. His comments on the case of Alexander Ogorodnikov in the light of the Helsinki accord on human rights were extremely informative and expressed powerfully.

In this country, as my hon. Friend said, we take our freedom for granted. The opportunity to vote, to express our views and to worship as we wish are fundamental to our way of life. In Russia, however, despite that country's signature of the Helsinki accord, the authorities blatantly fail to allow their citizens such human rights. I deplore the Soviet regime and distrust the word of its leadership. That is one reason why I strongly support the British Government's defence policies, particularly the retention of our nuclear deterrent, to ensure that our freedom is safeguarded.

We are all aware of the plight of many of Christian and of Jewish faith in the Soviet Union. They are oppressed, victimised and in many cases harassed, imprisoned and mistreated. However, the newsworthiness of the sufferings of ordinary people in Russia has diminished in the West. Regrettably, the stories of the dissidents and the oppressed

in Russia no longer command the newspaper headlines or get the media coverage that they deserve, yet the sufferings of individuals, their families and their friends go on. We in the West have a duty to ensure that the torch of freedom continues to burn and let those suffering in Russian gaols know that they are not forgotten. To that end, I was delighted to visit Mr. Athanasius Hart during his recent vigil at St. Sepulchre's church for Mr. Ogorodnikov, not only to support Mr. Hart but, I hope, to help to obtain freedom for Alexander Ogorodnikov.

In 1977, the Soviet Union, along with the United Kingdom, the United States of America and other countries, signed the Helsinki accord. In part VII of that agreement those signing agreed

"to respect human rights, freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or belief."

They agreed also

"to recognise and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practise alone or in community with others, religion or belief in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience."

The cruel and inhumane treatment received by many in the Soviet Union is at variance with the undertakings given when the Helsinki agreement was signed. Alexander Ogorodnikov is but one case in an unhappy line.

The story of Alexander Ogorodnikov has touched many of us deeply. His position is heartrending, as we have heard. He has committed no crime, nor harmed his country. He is neither a politician nor a political activist. He merely wants the freedom to worship God in his own way with other Christians and live a Christian life with his wife and child. For such a limited demand, he has been starved, imprisoned in inhumane conditions, denied all rights, separated from his family and friends and caged like a wild animal. For the activity of organising Bible studies, he is imprisoned and treated badly. This is the Russian way of implementing human rights post-Helsinki 1977.

We must remember that Alexander Ogorodnikov is not an isolated case. Altogether there are some 10,000 prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union of whom some 2,000 are religious believers. Soviet law states that believers may hold worship services only in a building registered for that purpose, but even members of registered churches are not allowed to discuss their beliefs outside the building registered for worship. Meanwhile, Christians who encourage others in the faith stand to lose their jobs.

The 1977 Helsinki accord on human rights, signed amid a fanfare of trumpets and loudly acclaimed, has turned out to be an absolute farce. The record of the USSR on the important issue of human rights is deplorable and has not shown any appreciable improvement since Helsinki. The suffering regrettably continues and the hard men of the Kremlin remain unconcerned, unmoved and unchanging.

11.55 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) has done a great service in bringing this matter to the attention of the House, and I warmly commend him for doing so.

Alexander Ogorodnikov has suffered the most appalling privations because he wishes to profess the Christian faith, to further his own spiritual pilgrimage in that faith and to discuss that faith with others. For that he has had the most appalling penalties which go far beyond anything that Soviet law, restrictive as it is, prescribes for someone who takes such actions. It is right that the attention of the world should be focused upon it. A total of 60,000 people have added their names to petitions in support of him and there have been many other petitions about others who have suffered similarly.

There is a lot of change going on in the Soviet Union at the moment. General Secretary Gorbachev has a lot of change on his plate as he embarks on economic reforms, but of crucial importance to the perception of the Soviet Union in the West is whether these attitudes towards religious dissidents will change. If they do not, no amount of glossy propaganda or overtures on wider issues like disarmament will convince people in the West that the necesssary changes have taken place.

Mr. Gorbachev put his name to a declaration alongside Rajiv Ghandi in Delhi at the end of his visit, on 27 November. That declaration said:

"Philosophies and policies based on violence and intimidation, inequality and oppression, and discrimination on the base of race, religion or colour, are immoral and impermissible. They spread intolerance, destroy man's noble aspirations and negate all human values."

I suspect that that sentence owes more to Indian than to Soviet drafting, but Mr. Gorbachev signed it with his name, and now is the time for him to demonstrate that he believes what he signed.

We all welcome the release of Irina Ratushinskaya. Whether or not that was influenced by the potential propaganda effect is immaterial to those of us whose concern was that she should be released. We want to see Alexander Ogorodnikov and others released. I hope that the Government will continue to add their voice, as they have already done, to campaigns for people such as this.

11.57 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Like my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I felt privileged to show my support for Alexander Ogorodnikov by taking part in the Bible readings at St. Sepulchre's church.

My colleagues have set out in detail the history of this sad case and have shown quite clearly that the cruel and inhuman treatment which Alexander Ogorodnikov has received contravenes the Helsinki agreement on human rights. I believe that his treatment also shows many instances of violations of the Soviet Union's own laws. Article 124 of the constitution of the USSR provides that

"freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognised for all citizens."

Article 125 says:

"in conformity with the interests of working people and in order to strengthen the socialist system the citizens of the USSR are guaranteed by law, (a) freedom of speech; (b) freedom of the press; (c) freedom of assembly".

Clearly, from what has been said about the arrest of Alexander Ogorodnikov and the publication of the seminar's magazine "Community" he has not been allowed free speech, freedom of the press or freedom of assembly. The Christian seminar was simply a small group of people wishing to discuss and strengthen their belief. There does not appear to be any legal basis for the Soviet Government to take action against them. In addition, practices and conditions in the camp often do not meet legal requirements. There is overcrowding and illegal detention, whilst punishment cells are built smaller than is specified by law.

[Mr. David Amess]

The treatment of Alexander Ogorodnikov needs dealing with urgently at the highest level. Along with my colleagues, I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to make representations to the Soviet authorities and to press for the immediate release of Alexander. We ask that the Prime Minister take up the case with Mr. Gorbachev, along with the whole question of human rights, when she goes to Moscow. We ask that she emphasises to him that people in the West cannot understand how people such as Alexander can be treated in such a way in a supposedly civilised society. My right hon. Friend needs to explain to Mr. Gorbachev that people in the West are extremely worried by the obvious failure of the Soviet Union to implement the Helsinki agreement. Such examples of its blatant contraventions make many people wonder whether the Soviet Union, if it cannot be trusted in this respect, can be trusted to abide by other agreements that it seeks to make.

When the Prime Minister met Mr. Gorbachev, she said that she thought that she could do business with him. I met him briefly myself and I agree with my right hon. Friend's judgment. That being so, I hope that in March, when my right hon. Friend goes to Moscow, she will do business successfully with Mr. Gorbachev on this important issue of human rights.

12 midnight

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): The issues before us in this evening's debate are important, and I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargeaves) for raising them. I am grateful also to my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess), and to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for contributing to the debate.

Alexander Ogorodnikov, who is the subject of our debate, is about 36 years old. He is a Christian. The suffering that he has had to undergo because of his faith has been movingly recounted by my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentleman. I do not wish to detain the House at length by recounting those sufferings, because the House is aware of them.

Alexander Ogorodnikov's story is well known to Foreign Office Ministers and officials. It has caused us concern for a considerable time, for a number of reasons. First, Alexander should not have been arrested. The organisation of a discussion group should not be considered a crime merely because the opinions that the members express are not those of the Government. Secondly, once arrested, he should have been given a fair trial and allowed to conduct a proper defence. Thirdly, once imprisoned, he should never have been subjected to the sort of treatment that he has received. One would not wish such treatment to be meted out to anyone, irrespective of his crime.

Sadly, Alexander's story is far from unique. There are many others languishing in prisons or labour camps for their faith. There are Baptists, Pentecostalists, Catholics, Moslems and, of course, many members of the Soviet Jewish community. In the short time that is available to me tonight I do not wish to spend more time detailing the tragic facts. Instead, I want to address what the Government can do and are doing on behalf of these people.

The Soviet Union has no monopoly of inhumanity and injustice. Eleven years ago in Helsinki, however, the Soviet Union, together with 35 other European Governments, put its signature to the Helsinki Final Act. In doing so it solemnly committed itself to a number of important undertakings. The one which particularly concerns us tonight is known as principle VIII. It is frequently quoted and I think that it bears repetition. It commits all those who signed it to

"recognise and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practise, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience".

One has only to reflect upon what that principle states to realise that the Soviet Union is in direct breach of it. We cannot allow it to continue to get away with it. That is why the British Government continue to return to the subject again and again in all out bilateral contacts with the Soviet Union, both directly an in multilateral forums such as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, and we shall continue to do that for as long as it is necessary. For example, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raises human rights issues regularly in his meetings with Mr. Shevardnadze. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) is at this moment in Moscow, where he is consulting Mr. Kovalev, the Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister. I know that he intends to raise human rights issues and will have the case of Alexander Ogorodnikov in mind.

I went to Vienna just before Christmas to address the CSCE review meeting on behalf of the European Community. I drew the attention of delegates to the harassment of religious believers and the many other ways in which citizens in certain countries were being deprived of their basic human rights. I warned that we and our partners in the European Community would continue to speak out for as long as the injustices persisted.

Our delegation in Vienna has ensured that human rights issues have been at the forefront of the meeting's attention throughout this first session, and it has pointed specifically to the case of Alexander Ogorodnikov as an example of the sort of behaviour that cannot be reconciled with the commitments contained in the Helsinki Final Act.

If those representations are to have their full effect, the Russians need to be convinced that the Government are not engaging in political point scoring but are representing the deeply felt concerns of the British public. That is why the debate tonight, together with the numerous pressure groups, organisations such as Keston college and many individuals who selflessly devote time and energy to bringing cases such as that of Alexander Ogorodnikov to public attention, have such a vital role to play. On behalf of the Government I should like to pay a warm tribute to them.

Public statements of condemnation, whether by private groups and individuals or by the Government, are not enough. Of course, we must make such statements, but for maximum effect they must be mixed with a good measure of quiet behind the scenes persuasion, or we risk producing only stubborn resistance. Quiet persuasion requires a certain element of confidentiality. That is why the Foreign Office sometimes prefers not to give full details of exchanges with the Soviet Government or other

Governments on human rights issues. That is also one of the reasons why, although we regularly raise individual cases, we avoid giving categorical commitments in public.

We cannot "force" the Soviet Union to behave better. Experience suggests that in practice threats to cancel trade deals, and cultural events, or to refuse to talk to the Soviet Government until they mend their ways, carry little weight. Sadly, such tactics are unlikely to do anything to help Alexander Ogorodnikov and his fellow sufferers, and our general principle must be to try to expand contacts, not cut back on them. Cultural contacts, trade contacts, contacts in any area are one of the means that we have of influencing the Russians toward more civilised behaviour. The Vienna CSCE meeting was one such attempt, semi-publicly and privately, to raise issues such as we have been discussing tonight. As I have already said, we raised the case of Alexander.

It might be of interest to the House to say that at the Vienna meeting the Soviet delegation tabled a proposal for a conference of all 35 participating states to be held in Moscow to discuss the so-called Basket III subjects—human contacts, information, culture and education. As yet we do not know much about the proposal. We have only the bare outline of it. It will be discussed along with proposals in the same area from other CSCE participating states in the next session of the meeting. Then we will want to know more about what is proposed. We will want to know specifically whether it is envisaged that human rights as well as human contacts will be on the agenda. We will want to know what arrangements are to be made for attendance by interest groups of various types from abroad, and from interests groups from within the country concerned, especially Helsinki monitors. We will also want to know about publicity arrangements.

We believe that any country offering to host such meetings will need to have its own performance scrupulously examined. In the case of the Moscow conference proposal, for example, it would be difficult to conceive that agreement would be reached to hold such a meeting if foreign broadcasts were still jammed or Helsinki monitors still imprisoned. But, as I have already explained, the main thing that we will be looking for in considering this and other proposals in this area will be a mechanism to increase the incentive for participating states to match their implementation record to the brave words that they signed at Helsinki 11 years ago.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we cannot be anything but gravely disappointed with the progress that has been made during the past 11 years. The cruel death of Anatoly Marchenko a few weeks ago, at a time when his release was being widely forecast, is a reminder of how much progress we have to make.

As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, there have been some encouraging signs. These recent developments demonstrate that the Soviet Government are at times prepared to respond to sustained western pressure. Shcharansky, Orlov and others who have come to the West have all stressed the importance for the human rights movement in the Soviet Union of continued support from Western Governments, both public and behind the scenes. Their voices are voices that we should listen to.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to the Gorbachev policy of greater openness. That policy has struck a chord with many, both in his own country and abroad. But those who wish to believe that the Soviet Union has turned the corner will come up against the sad fact that in reality the breath of fresh air creeping into some areas of Soviet society has not yet been heard or felt by those who run human rights policies. We have much progress to make.

Our aim must be to persuade the Soviet Government to question their own attitudes — to put themselves under the microscope. Sometimes repressive practices can become institutionalised to the extent that Governments no longer believe that they are wrong. We must try to bring the Soviet Government to understand that a country of such stature as theirs, a superpower, should not feel threatened by handfulls of brave individuals who refuse to conform and insist on thinking for themselves. The Soviet Government should also understand that lessons of history suggest that in the long run such persecution does not succeed in stamping out non-comformist thinking—often the reverse; it encourages it.

We also have to try to get across to the Soviet Union the extent to which their failure to meet their CSCE obligations damages their reputation in the West and undermines the "charm offensive" to which Mr. Gorbachev and others in the Soviet leadership have been devoting so much energy in recent months.

In a letter smuggled out from his prison in May 1986, Ogorodnikov appealed to the Soviet Government for his own execution. There can be no more heartrending evidence of the suffering that he is undergoing. I appeal to the Soviet Government—and I am sure that all my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will join me in saying this — to consider whether his suffering is really necessary and to set him free before it is too late. I also ask the Soviet Government to ask themselves again whether it is in their own interests that the hundreds of prisoners of conscience still incarcerated in labour camps need to remain there. The answer from this House must be no. The answer must go out clearly, and I believe it has done so tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order.)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time upon Thursday 22 January

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 22 January

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Agreement

1. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will report on his assessment of the results of the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

3. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): Steady progress is being made, not least in the area of security co-operation. Experience has clearly demonstrated how views reflecting the interests of the minority can be taken into account without threatening the position of the majority or undermining United Kingdom sovereignty.

Mr. Ross: As one who is strongly in favour of the agreement, which is constantly being misrepresented by Unionist politicians in the Province, may I urge the Secretary of State to take the initiative himself and, with the aid of television, spell out to the citizens of the whole of the United Kingdom the exact terms of the agreement and how they could be developed if only the politicians in Northern Ireland would sit down and work together for the common good?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his consistent support for the agreement and I take serious note of his point. There is no doubt that the best hope for the defeat of terrorism, which is so important to everybody in Northern Ireland, must be in closer and more effective co-operation with the Republic of Ireland. Everybody in Northern Ireland knows that, and this agreement offers us the best prospect of that being achieved.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us who support the general Unionist position believe that this agreement is the only practical instrument for greater co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and that it can bring as great benefits to the Unionists in Northern Ireland as can greater co-operation between the communities there? Will my right hon. Friend urge the Unionist parties to come back to this Chamber to discuss democratically the way in which the agreement is working for their benefit?

Mr. King: I hope that they will recognise the need to return to this Chamber and make a constructive contribution here. If they do not, their arguments will not be listened to with any great respect. In looking at the progress of the agreement, I note that it offers the opportunity for the minority tradition to be respected and for minority views to be taken into account. It is greatly in the interests of the majority in Northern Ireland that the minority should feel that their views are fairly respected as well.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: When does the Secretary of State now expect that the European convention on terrorism will be ratified by the Irish Republic? That was held out as one of the prizes of the Anglo-Irish Agreement 14 months ago. Will he take a £100 bet with me on this?

Mr. King: I shall not take up the offer in the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question. I do not intend to speculate on exchange rates. I have enough problems with other matters in Ireland without taking on that issue as well. I understand that, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, the convention has been signed by the Minister of Justice in the Republic of Ireland. It has passed through the lower House and we hope that it will make the further progress necessary for ratification. The right hon. Gentleman will also have noted the encouraging news about a more effective response to the issue of extradition. Indeed, an item of news this morning tends once again to reflect the improved relationship and the improved attitude that flows from the agreement.

Mr. Gow: Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is possible to acknowledge and respect the Nationalist tradition and the Nationalist position in Northern Ireland without being a supporter of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Does he not understand that to give the Irish Republic responsibility for representing Nationalists in discussions with Her Majesty's Government is intensely divisive and, in some ways, insulting to the Nationalists in Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I respect my hon. Friend's views, and I agree that it is perfectly possible to respect the Nationalist tradition without being a subscriber to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. However, an awful lot of people in Northern Ireland have not been very good at doing that in recent years. The agreement enshrines the point that if there is to be greater harmony in Northern Ireland, it is important to recognise that within the Province there are people who hold a different point of view from that of the Unionist majority. It is in the interests of the Unionist majority that that should be recognised more publicly. If I understood correctly my hon. Friend's question, I hope that he will seek to urge the Unionist majority to recognise the proper rights and the respect that is due to the Nationalist minority.

Mr. Archer: I revert to the Secretary of State's answer to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross). Does he

agree that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is an abstract concept which exists, and can only exist, in the minds of human beings? Does it not follow that its importance lies wholly in what it leads human beings to do? Will the Secretary of State consider publishing a list of the things that it has led him and his Department to do which otherwise they probably would not have done, so that we may all make a rational judgment about it?

Mr. King: I shall certainly look at ways in which we might more effectively list the achievements and the effects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. As for the progress of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, I note that there are many people in Northern Ireland, certainly in the majority community, who believe that security is overwhelmingly the most important aspect of the agreement. I could list improved performance on the seizure of arms, the apprehension of mortars, the recovery of explosives and more effective extradition procedures. I rest mainly on the judgment of the Chief Constable of the RUC. He says that the agreement provides him and his force with the best opportunity that they have had to improve security and co-operation. I pay attention also to the entirely opposite point of view. It is quite clear that the IRA regards the agreement as a serious threat to its operations.

Northern Ireland Assembly

2. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning the revival of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The Government have offered a round table conference on devolution and in advance of this are ready to facilitate informal talks among the parties. There is a wide measure of support for a return of greater responsibility to Belfast from Westminster and we have received a number of representations to that effect.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Bearing in mind that Northern Ireland has no system of local government to compare with that in Britain, does he agree that it is unfortunate that there should not be a domestic forum in which Northern Ireland political activity could be induced in preference to the politics of the street and the politics of the courtroom?

Mr. Scott: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. As he knows, we established the Assembly and encouraged and co-operated with it. We should like conditions to be created in which it could again play a constructive role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. It was only when the Assembly refused to undertake any of the work that had been laid on it by Parliament that we decided to dissolve it.

Mr. Bell: Will the Minister confirm that there is no question of returning to the status quo ante that existed prior to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and that there will be no return to the Protestant ascendancy in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the Anglo-Irish Agreement provides sufficient scope for devolution for all the people of Northern Ireland? Is it not a fact that those who have ears should hear?

Mr. Scott: I assert once again that the Government believe that devolution remains the right objective for us to pursue, and as far as possible we shall pursue that objective. As for the hon. Gentleman's first remark, it is absolutely clear that the only basis on which such arrangements could be introduced would be on what was acceptable to the representatives of constitutional politics who reflect both traditions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend make it plain that it is not necessary to resurrect the Assembly in order to re-introduce a greater measure of local government in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Scott: That is certainly true, but perhaps my hon. Friend will remember what I have just said about the need for widespread acceptance of any changes in arrangements for Northern Ireland. The Government believe that devolution rather than increasing the powers of local government is more likely to achieve that.

Mr. Hume: In view of the call of the Secretary of State earlier this week for talks between the parties in Northern Ireland without preconditions about devolution, may I tell the Secretary of State that my party is ready to participate in such talks?

Mr. Scott: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will welcome that assurance as warmly as I do.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend agree that until those on the Unionist side of this problem appreciate that it is absolutely essential for them to participate locally, whether it is in an Assembly or in any other chamber, including this Chamber, it really will be impracticable to have revivals of Assemblies such as the Northern Ireland Assembly? We would all like to see it happen. The question is, will they let it happen?

Mr. Scott: The Government clearly understand the feelings of the Unionist community and their political representatives about the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but I believe that it is folly for them to boycott this House and contacts with British Ministers on all of this. The sooner they get back to proper relationships in these matters, the better.

Street Marches and Demonstrations

4. **Mr. Mallon** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the amount of police time devoted to policing street marches and demonstrations over the past 12 months.

Mr. Scott: Last year, between May and September, when the majority of such events occurred, it is estimated that a total of 334,000 man-hours were devoted to policing street marches and demonstrations.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Minister confirm that the Social Democratic and Labour party is the only party in the north of Ireland which recognises that there is a policing problem and that, because of this, it is the only party which has not caused problems for the police or put them in danger in the way that was outlined in the Minister's reply?

Mr. Scott: I very much hope that the party which the hon. Gentleman represents will be able to continue to develop its expressions of support for the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland and continue to support all those who believe that parades and marches should be conducted in a way which facilitates the efforts of the police to maintain law and order on these occasions.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: Does my hon. Friend agree that in grappling with these problems the RUC's men and women have conducted themselves in a wholly non-partisan, non-sectarian fashion; in short, that there is no such thing in Northern Ireland as Catholic policemen or Protestant policemen, but just policemen under the law? So is it not sad that there are those in high places, political or ecclesiastical, who refuse to encourage young men and women to join that non-political police force in the national interest?

Mr. Scott: I find it difficult to overstate my respect for the skill and professionalism of the RUC and the way in which it has handled these parades, marches and other public order situations in recent months. I would certainly encourage everyone in Northern Ireland who wants a peaceful society to give his wholehearted and unequivocal support to the RUC.

Mr. Spencer: Will my hon. Friend accept that those of us from constituencies from which are recruited the regiments which presently serve in Northern Ireland are dismayed at those pleas from politicians in Northern Ireland for people to assemble in large numbers, thereby increasing the risk to our troops serving there?

Mr. Scott: I agree wholeheartedly with that. I can only reiterate that whether it is the security forces, the Army or the police who are involved, they deserve the support and co-operation of all those who hope for a peaceful future in Northern Ireland.

Sampson Report

5. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning the Sampson report.

Mr. Tom King: I have received a number of inquiries about the progress of Mr. Sampson's inquiry and the contents of his reports. As the House is aware, the first part of Mr. Sampson's report is now with the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. The second part is expected to be completed by Mr. Sampson shortly. As I informed the House, I shall wish to make a statement as soon as possible on any aspects of the report that fall within my responsibility.

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware, however, that there is a degree of impatience at the fact that this report is always promised as coming shortly? When does he expect to make the statement that he promised over three months ago? During Mr. Sampson's inquiries, did he get round to interviewing the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and his deputy, as was the intention of the deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester when he was involved?

Mr. King: With regard to the seond half of the question, my understanding is, yes, Sir. In regard to the first part, I clearly gave the information available to me in my answer. That is a matter for Mr. Sampson, who, I know, has been anxious to make the most thorough but speedy completion of his inquiries. I fully share the impatience that the hon. Member feels. It is obviously very important for the RUC and its good name that these matters are resolved at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: The Secretary of State said that he would make a statement eventually on those parts of the report which fell within his responsibility. Will he explain to the House what those responsibilities are?

Mr. King: As I made clear in an earlier reply, aspects of the report which involve allegations of criminal offences, on which criminal charges may be brought, will have to follow the normal procedure. In so far as they affect organisation, management structure and wider policing issues, there may be aspects which fall clearly within my responsibility.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I appreciate the sensitivity of the matter for the Secretary of State. Does he intend to publish the report as far as possible? Will he contemplate publishing as much of it as possible on the lines of other reports relating to Northern Ireland which have been published in the past?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman must understand that the report was commissioned by the Chief Constable of the RUC. He has forwarded the first part to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. Clearly, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and conceivably my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, will be concerned with aspects of it. Police reports of this kind would not normally be published, but I hear what the hon. Member says. Obviously, I am anxious that everything possible should be done to clear the matter up fully and to deal with it effectively, but I am in some difficulties in replying fully because I have not myself seen the contents of the report.

Mr. Archer: In view of the disclosure earlier this week by Mr. Stalker that he would have remained in the police force had he been permitted to continue the inquiry into the RUC, is it not vital in the interests of everyone that, irrespective of the Sampson report, the public should be told quickly what inquiries Mr. Stalker was making and what conclusions he had reached, otherwise is speculation not inevitable that he was investigating something important and that some people in high positions wanted to prevent his investigation?

Mr. King: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's question illustrates all too clearly the importance of getting as much as possible established in the public domain at the earliest opportunity and of resolving the matters as early as possible, otherwise such rumour and speculation will spread. The House should remember that the question whether Mr. Stalker was or was not available for the inquiry was not a matter for me but for the chief constable of Manchester, who advised the Chief Constable of the RUC that Mr. Stalker was no longer available, so alternative arrangements had to be made. Having said that, I certainly recognise that while Mr. Stalker was not able to continue, the whole of his team which was working on it did continue its work, albeit under the direction of Mr. Sampson.

Intergovernmental Security Divisions

6. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on meetings he has had with Ministers in the Government of the Republic of Ireland on co-operation on security matters.

Mr. Scott: A special meeting of the intergovernmental conference was held on 31 October last year to discuss cross-border security co-operation. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I frequently discuss this subject with members of the Irish Government at regular meetings of the intergovernmental conference. My right hon. Friend also met the Taoiseach on 28 November. It would not be appropriate to disclose details of those discussions, but both Governments are determined to press ahead in further developing security co-operation.

Mr. Dubs: Will the Minister confirm that there is now excellent co-operation from the Republic on security and that those Unionist politicians who say otherwise are deliberately and mischievously misleading their supporters?

Mr. Scott: All I can say is that there is improved security co-operation. The foundations have been laid for further improvements, but it will be the implementation of the reports which have now been agreed between the RUC and the Garda and which have been discussed by Ministers, that will lead to that further improvement that we all wish to see.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: If there is this improvement — and any improvement in security co-operation is welcome — why is it that even the smallest infringement of the border by our forces in pursuit of those whom the Taoiseach has called the common enemy is built up into an international incident in Dublin?

Mr. Scott: There is another question on the Order Paper on that subject, so I imagine that it would not be proper for me to go into great detail now. Our troops are warned about incursions into the Republic of Ireland and genuinely do their best to avoid such incursions. However, when they are in pursuit of terrorists there are occasionally incursions. We regret those and I can understand the sensitivity of the Irish Government about other troops being on their territory.

Mr. McNamara: If Her Majesty's subjects in Northern Ireland conspire to make incursions into the Republic of Ireland and plead guilty to unlawful assembly, are they guilty of an offence within Northern Irish law for committing a conspiracy to invade a foreign country?

Mr. Scott: That would be a matter for the courts to decide.

Sir John Farr: While everyone welcomes the co-operation north and south of the border, has my hon. Friend analysed the situation that may arise shortly with a change of Government in the Republic?

Mr. Scott: We have signed an agreement with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and embarked on the work of an international conference in which cross-border security co-operation is an important aspect. It is not for me to speculate about the possible results of a change of Administration. However, I hope that the co-operation which benefits everyone within the island of Ireland will be continued.

Political Leaders (Discussions)

7. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with political leaders from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

8. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what meetings he has had since Christmas with Northern Ireland political leaders.

Mr. Tom King: I maintain regular contact with the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour party and the Alliance party of Northern Ireland, but not at present with the leaders of the Unionist parties, who have unfortunately not felt able to have talks with me or my ministerial colleagues. On 28 November 1986 I met the Taoiseach and on 8 December presided as joint chairman over a regular meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Canavan: Has the Secretary of State taken the trouble to sound out Opposition politicians in the Republic as to what is likely to happen to the so-called Anglo-Irish Agreement in the event of a change of Government in the Republic in the forthcoming general election?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman may not have been listening to the answer given earlier by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. It may come as a shock to the hon. Gentleman, but I entirely agree with the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: In the absence of withdrawal or revision of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, how does my right hon. Friend propose to end the deadlock in co-operation and communication with the political leaders of the overwhelming majority of the population of Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I entirely recognise, as my hon. Friend has emphasised, the importance of re-establishing a sensible dialogue. The absence of such dialogue has not been to the advantage of the Unionists of Northern Ireland in the past year or to the advantage of those for whom they seek to speak. I have made it absolutely clear that the evidence is now before them that the agreement has not threatened their position or undermined the position of the majority, nor has it infringed the sovereignty about which they are concerned. I hope they will recognise that after the sterile futility of past months there is now good sense in seeking to engage in talks on some basis. I have made it clear that I am willing to enter into any discussions without any pre-conditions respecting the opposition and hostility that many may feel to the agreement.

Mr. Alton: Arising from the discussions which the Secretary of State has had with politicians in Northern Ireland, in how many local authorities Unionist politicians are fully playing their part despite their original opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Does he accept that politicians on the Alliance Benches join him in hoping that the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland will play its part here in the Chamber again as quickly as possible?

Mr. King: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I very much endorse the second part of his question. However, I am afraid that I am unable to help him in answer to the first part of his question, because it is very difficult at the moment to know the answer to that. The picture is very confused at the moment. However, it is quite clear that the policy of abstention, adjournment or whatever alternative versions are given to it in local authorities, has been utterly pointless. It has achieved nothing except to disadvantage local government electors and ratepayers in those areas. That point is becoming increasingly clear to sensible people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cormack: Are not members of the majority population in Northern Ireland aware of how many friends, and how much influence, are being lost by the boycott on the part of their leaders both of Parliament and of my right hon. Friend and his colleagues?

Mr. King: There is a strange concept among some people in Northern Ireland of loyalty to the Queen but of not ascribing loyalty to Parliament and any Government. People must understand that under our constitution the Queen in Parliament means that the Parliament of the United Kingdom is, in our finest tradition, the place where ultimately grievances or concerns can be raised.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have political leaders in Northern Ireland ever raised with the Secretary of State the allegations of Captain Holroyd and Mr. Colin Wallace? Is it true that those allegations were communicated to the Prime Minister in 1984? Is there any substance to those allegations?

Mr. King: The answer to the first part of the question, on which the rest of the question hangs, is no, Sir.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend recall that we had a debate upstairs lasting all of one minute, in which the American £50 million donation was given to this country, whether we wanted it or not? What discussions have so far taken place with the leaders of both sides in Northern Ireland on the disposition and spending of that money?

Mr. King: The structure under which the international fund is set up is that of an independent board. It is separate from Government, and the board is about to embark on its task. I know that a number of people have made applications to it and I am sure that it can make a most useful contribution. We recognise it as a most remarkable gesture made in a spirit of goodwill and appreciation by our ancient ally, and by good friends of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Hume: Is the Secretary of State aware that had I met him since Christmas I would have raised with him the fact that the Western area health board has introduced a 12-hour working day for nurses and told them that if they do not accept they will be sacked? Is this not outrageous, and will he take steps to correct it?

Mr. King: I am not sure how the hon. Gentleman's supplementary follows from the main question, but I shall look into the point.

Dr. Blackburn: Will my right hon. Friend not only confirm that his door is open for discussions with members of all political parties in the Province, but make a positive step to encouraging such dialogue, because it is only through dialogue that any success will be achieved?

Mr. King: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am grateful for what he says. If people had any doubts about it, the events of the past year have proved that alternative routes offer no prospects of a sensible outcome. People can learn only from their experiences, and I hope they will realise that it is possible to have sensible talks and that they need not be afraid that, by talking to me, they will somehow undermine the principle of their position. We shall see whether, as sensible people, we can sit down and find a better way forward that will benefit all the people of the Province.

Prison Officers Association

9. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Prison Officers Association of Northern Ireland; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Scott: In view of my day-to-day responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland, I normally represent my right hon. Friend at meetings with the Northern Ireland Prison Officers Association. I last met national and Northern Ireland Prison Officers Association representatives on 4 October 1985, when we discussed future employment of prison officers and their roles, prison regimes, operational matters, and the programme for opening Maghaberry prison and amalgamating the two prisons at Maze.

Mr. Cox: In view of that answer, which shows that some 18 months have passed since the Minister met prison officers in Northern Ireland, may I suggest that he should, as a matter of urgency, seek to meet them soon? Is he aware of their deep concern as to their security and that of their families, in view of threats often made against them? Is he further aware of the complaint by them about the lack of modern facilities when on duty in prisons in Northern Ireland? As these are urgent matters, should not the Minister give them his attention soon?

Mr. Scott: I am always ready to meet representatives of the Prison Officers Association. They have only to ask to have a meeting. There may be an early opportunity to meet their representatives.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

10. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to visit the Republic of Ireland to discuss the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

11. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent talks he has had with representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ireland on negotiation of the Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Tom King: We regularly meet representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ireland within the framework of the Intergovernmental Conference. The last meeting was on 8 December and I have placed the joint statements issued after this and other meetings of the conference in the Library.

Mr. Parry: Does the Secretary of State agree that the agreement legitimises the border for the first time in history and that it is the cause of a wave of violence by paramilitary groups? Does he also agree that the conduct of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and his colleagues recently bears out the fears of Labour Members who voted against the agreement?

Mr. King: I note what the hon. Gentleman said about the agreement legitimising the border and I know that that is a view advanced by many. It confirms the position of the majority in Northern Ireland, in that they are not at any risk of being dragooned into a united Ireland against their wishes. That reassurance of the majority is an important component of the agreement, and, coupled with respect for the traditions and interests of the minority, is the right basis on which a better long-term understanding can be reached within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Flannery: Was the question of the unsatisfactory nature of the Diplock courts or the question of having three judges instead of one, which surely would be more satisfactory, raised? What is transpiring in that general direction?

Mr. King: The Diplock courts and the problems of terrorist trials which must be conducted without a jury, as is the position in a current case in Dublin, have been discussed. I made clear the Government's position on those matters in an earlier reply, to which I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention.

Mr. Gow: Do Her Majesty's Ministers and Ministers of the Government of the Irish Republic believe that it is possible to govern one part of the United Kingdom differently from the rest, save with the consent of a majority of the people who are to be governed differently?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend will know that there has been no change in the arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland during the course of this Government. It is precisely one of the strengths of the agreement that it does not affect the method of government of Northern Ireland, while at the same time respecting the interests and traditions of the minority.

Mr. Winnick: There is certainly a curious alliance in the House against the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Has it occurred to the Secretary of State that there might be a case for having a referendum on this unique situation, both in the Republic of Ireland, if that was the wish of the Irish authorities, and in Britain and Northern Ireland? If that referendum secured, as indeed it would, a large majority, would it not strengthen the agreement?

Mr. King: I agree that there can be curious alliances in matters affecting Northern Ireland, and perhaps I know that as well as anyone. The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, because he will know that there have been suggestions of an application for some form of referendum, and one of the questions that it would raise is what should be the constituency for that referendum.

Mr. Bell: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had the full support of this House, as it had the full support of the Irish Dail? Therefore, it has the full support of two sovereign peoples. Is it not a fact that the Anglo-Irish Agreement provides as much opportunity for the Unionist community to reflect its traditions and history as it does for the Nationalists? There is something in the Anglo-Irish Agreement for both traditions. Is that not the case?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments, and I certainly endorse his remark that the overwhelming majority both in this House and in the Parliament of the Republic, and the much wider international community, welcomed this measure. The tragedy is clearly that at present Unionists do not recognise that the real beneficiaries of a more willing acceptance and understanding of the fairness of their position in relation to the minority community would be the majority community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Alton: Does the Secretary of State agree that the reconciling process which the Anglo-Irish Agreement is about is not helped by inflamatory language such as that deployed earlier this week by Viscount Brookeborough when he described Cardinal O'Fiaich as "an evil prelate"?

Mr. King: There is a responsibility on all people in positions of influence to take care not to inflame passions. It is the easiest thing in the world to excite hatred in Northern Ireland, which often leads in other circumstances to extremely nasty acts and incidents. Everyone in positions of responsibility needs to exercise great care in the language that they use.

Harland and Wolff (AOR Contract)

12. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his monitoring of the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel contract at Harland and Wolff.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Viggers): Construction work on the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel is scheduled to commence later this year. Harland and Wolff's performance and costs in building this ship will be subject to a stringent system of financial and performance controls which will be monitored by independent consultants.

Mr. Brown: As the Northern Ireland Office is not impartial in this matter will the Minister name the independent consultants that his Department is using to monitor the contract and tell the House what arrangements are being made for independent scrutiny of that contract?

Mr. Viggers: The consultants are Touche Ross management consultants. The hon. Gentleman inquired about the availability of the report. The terms of reference given to the consultants extend beyond the specific question of AOR monitoring and it is not appropriate to release what is effectively a commercially confidential contract. However, I can confirm that Harland and Wolff's performance and costs in buiilding AOR will be monitored strictly in accordance with the terms of the Secretary of State's announcement on 24 April 1986.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

13. **Mr. Archer** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will next meet the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland to discuss the operation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

17. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from Unionist parties in Northern Ireland on the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: Unfortunately, the leaders of the Unionist parties feel unable to have discussions with me, but I am obviously aware of several concerns felt by members of the Unionist parties and I remain ready to discuss with them the Anglo-Irish Agreement, or any other matters, at any time. I meet the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour party and the Alliance party regularly and hope to meet them again soon.

Mr. Archer: As the whole purpose of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was to facilitate discussions with the Republic, would it not be pointless if it led to the termination of discussions with everyone else? Will the Secretary of State confirm that any proposal emerging from the Intergovernmental Conference will be the subject of consultations with any party or group in Northern Ireland

which wishes to express a view on the merits? For that purpose, will it be made known in good time before the proposal is implemented?

Mr. King: I am more than ready completely to endorse what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said. One of the least truthful statements in Northern Ireland is that somehow the Unionists are debarred from putting forward their views and opinions. I have made it absolutely clear that I would welcome them at any time, and I hope that they will take up those opportunities.

Mr. Soley: When the Secretary of State next meets the Unionist parties, will he reiterate that no agreement jointly negotiated between the British and Irish Governments can be destroyed by threat of force or undermined by a veto applied by any group or political party? Can he make it absolutely clear to them that the will of two democratically elected Parliaments of Britain and Ireland is sovereign in these matters?

Mr. King: Of all the people in Northern Ireland, I would have thought previously that it was least necessary to remind Unionists that the United Kingdom Parliament is sovereign and that its views should be respected.

Border Incursions

14. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice is being given to the security forces concerning recent incursions into Southern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Police and Army commanders are well aware of the importance of avoiding incursions. Policemen and soldiers, particularly those belonging to newly arrived units, are advised frequently of the need to avoid incursions into the Republic of Ireland when operating close to the border.

Mr. Bruinvels: While thanking my hon. Friend for his detailed reply, may I ask him to confirm that it is not just a matter of troops from Northern Ireland going into the South, but of troops from Southern Ireland crossing the border into the North? We should have a give and take policy, and it is rather unfair that some legal authorities in Southern Ireland are promoting the fact that some of our troops have lost their way on the border.

Mr. Scott: It is important to recognise that in effectively carrying out their duties the security forces of both jurisdictions have to operate right up to the border. The troops are, of course, forbidden to cross the border, but incursions into both jurisdictions take place from time to time as a consequence of the joint pursuit of the common enemy of both security forces — the terrorist. I should mention that this matter was discussed at the last meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Smith: Is the Prime Minister content that her Government preside over a society in which the chairman of Guinness can earn £350,000 a year while thousands of pensioners — *[Interruption.]* — are freezing because they cannot afford to heat their homes? Is such a gulf between the rich and poor not an inevitable consequence of the Prime Minister's and her Government's philosophy and system of values?

The Prime Minister: With regard to the first part of the question, the hon. Gentleman knows that we are to have a reply to a private notice question later today.

The way in which this Government have looked after the needs of pensioners in severe weather is greatly in excess of the services and amounts that any other Government have previously given. The severe weather payments are on top of the scale rates for heating in the supplementary benefit payments, and on top of the heating additions that are paid regularly throughout the year.

Mr. Couchman: In the present dreadful spell of cold weather, perhaps Kent has suffered as badly as anywhere. Many shops in my constituency are virtually out of food and access to the Medway towns is almost impossible. Movement is very difficult indeed. Will my right hon. Friend give urgent consideration to whether we should declare a state of emergency? That could help the situation. Will my right hon. Friend further consider giving permission for the unfettered use of troops, without consideration of budget?

The Prime Minister: I do not consider that a declaration of a state of emergency would be appropriate. Of course, we shall see how help can be brought in to move in food and necessary supplies to people who are without them.

Mr. Kinnock: Has the Prime Minister's attention been drawn to the commendable view expressed in the *Financial Times* this morning that self-regulation can work only if people who are supervised have a sense of obligation towards the system and if that is greater than the desire to win their way in any particular case? In view of the widespread disquiet about financial dealings, including in the City itself, will the Prime Minister now take steps to make the Securities and Investments Board a statutory body with powers to investigate and prosecute any cases of abuse during mergers and takeovers?

The Prime Minister: I think not at present. Most people will accept that action has been taken very quickly indeed in setting up inspections under the Companies Act by Board of Trade inspectors. We must await the result of the report. It is far too early to go from the present voluntary self-regulation and conclude that we should go to a full statutory system. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the *Financial Times*. He will find that there were leaders in overseas papers, including in the United States, saying that the speed at which action has been taken under the voluntary system has sometimes exceeded the swiftness of action under any statutory system.

Mr. Kinnock: From the Prime Minister's answer, are we to believe that if the current evidence of gross abuse were to continue we would, in a short time, have the introduction of a statutory system so that full force could be brought to bear against those who are abusing their knowledge and office in the course of mergers or takeovers, or are we to believe that because statutory

schemes have not been introduced elsewhere there is no circumstance in which the Prime Minister would wish one to be introduced in Britain?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman concludes too much. Insider dealing was not even a criminal offence under the Labour Government, yet it is now. But then, he is always expecting something totally different from us. We have made insider trading a criminal offence and, the right hon. Gentleman knows, criminal prosecutions are a matter for the appropriate authorities and not for the Government. Board of Trade investigations are implemented under the Companies Act and come under the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Inspections have been implemented very quickly, and they are now under way.

Mr. Kinnock: The value of mergers and takeovers has multiplied tenfold during the time that the Prime Minister has been in office, so these matters are of great importance to hundreds and thousands of people, both inside and outside the City. The Prime Minister introduced deregulation and is now having to clean up the mess left by the abuses of that system. Will she make the SIB statutory in order to help with that process?

The Prime Minister: I answered that question in my initial reply to the right hon. Gentleman. There are two factors. First, insider trading is now a criminal offence although it was not a criminal offence under a Labour Government. Secondly, there is now voluntary regulation, and I believe that there are powers in statute eventually for Ministers to take over if voluntary regulation turns out not to be right. However, it is much too soon to judge. Action has been taken very quickly by Board of Trade inspectors under the present system. They are in the process of establishing the facts. Indeed, if the right hon. Gentleman thought about it, he might agree that it is as well to establish the facts before drawing any conclusions.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. Friend has shown her great concern for those most in need by acting swiftly to help to provide the additional heating allowance. Does she not therefore utterly condemn the actions of staff at the main post office in East Sheen in my constituency in closing their doors for the past five working days because, they claim, it is too cold to work? They have thereby locked out claimants, including pensioners, thus ensuring that they cannot cash their benefit cheques. As a result, those people cannot buy food or fuel——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Hanley: Those people are therefore having to trudge in the snow and slush to sub post offices that are prepared to open.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made his point very effectively. However, we would all wish to praise and thank those who have gone to work, despite the difficult circumstances. They have been determined to carry on with their jobs and to get medical help, supplies or cash to those who need them. Perhaps that serves to highlight those who have not made such efforts.

Dr. Owen: In view of the widespread concern about the young single homeless, which will go on long after the cold weather snap, will the Prime Minister reconsider the board and lodging regulations as well as the possibility of giving special help to local councils for emergency programmes to help young people? It is no answer to say that council houses are still standing vacant, because under the Act councils do not have responsibility for the young single homeless. There is a major gap in our social provision, and some action would be very welcome.

The Prime Minister: I think that it is an answer to say that there is a good deal of council house property standing vacant. If housing is not being used, it could obviously be put to use for homeless families. It is because the right hon. Gentleman knows that that is an answer that he tried to avoid it in his question.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will my right hon. Friend please bear in mind that although the existence of a statutory body in the form of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States did not prevent the Boesky scandal, some of us have felt for some time that the increasing internationalisation of financial markets, with all the complexities and difficulties for national regulation that they bring, means that we should now look towards a statutory body to help with these matters?

The Prime Minister: It is too soon to conclude that we should change the present system, which has been in operation for only a short time. As my hon. Friend knows, there is provision for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to take statutory powers. However, we should go further with the present system before we conclude that we should go to a statutory one.

Q2. **Miss Maynard** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Miss Maynard: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is a scandal that, 15 months after her Government promised to review the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, the Home Office still prevaricates? Does she further agree that nothing undermines the rule of law more than keeping innocent people in gaol because authorities do not have the courage to admit that they made a mistake? Will she reassure the House today that her Government are conducting a genuine investigation and not a cover-up?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary continues to review that case carefully and will inform the House of his conclusions when he has reached them.

Q3. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hamilton: Is there any country in which unmployment is falling faster than in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Suffice it to say that, on a seasonally adjusted basis, unemployment has fallen here for the fifth successive month. That is good news. We hope that that will continue, although we are bound to have problems. It is also good news that unemployment is falling in the north, the north-west, the west midlands and Wales. I hope that the whole House will welcome that news.

Q4. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Atkinson: Has the Prime Minister seen this morning's report by the Royal Institute of Public Administration, which dubiously clears her of politicising the top echelons of the Civil Service? In view of that report and all the implications, together with the criticism that has been made of her decision not to allow civil servants to appear before Select Committees and truthfully answer questions without the permission of the Secretary of State, will she now reconsider her previous answer and allow civil servants the openness that is recommended in the report?

The Prime Minister: I do not wholly accept the underlying premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. The Select Committee asked how far civil servants could properly answer for their own conduct in a particular case. There are certain strong traditions in relation to that. I am sure that people would not wish to undermine those traditions or in any way to turn the House into a kind of conduct court when they have their own disciplinary procedure. With regard to what the Royal Institute of Public Administration said, we should pay tribute to the impartial administration and the traditions and standards of the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayward: Will my right hon. Friend consider today the comments made recently by a senior political analyst on local radio in Bristol to the effect that the loony Left is damaging the Labour party, that the economy is in reasonable shape and that the Conservatives will win the next election? The senior political analyst concerned was the right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks).

The Prime Minister: The point in that most excellent dissertation with which I wish to quarrel is that it is not the loony Left but the Left in power in local authorities. That is the way in which the present Labour party acts when in power.

Q5. **Mr. Terry Davis** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Davis: As the Prime Minister is so pleased with the latest unemployment figures, will she now confirm that the cumulative effect of the past five months has been to reduce the unemployment rate from 11·4 per cent. a year ago to 11·3 per cent. in December? As she is so easily pleased with the figures, is she aware that my constituents think that it is because she does not really care?

The Prime Minister: Hon. Gentlemen have been mouthing the phrase "people care", but we know that that is not the case from the record of Opposition Members on many social service issues and by the way in which they did not hesitate to reduce the value of pensioners' savings by inflation. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would be pleased that unemployment has fallen for the fifth month running and that over 1 million more jobs have been created in the past three years. That is a good record and the prospects for the economy look good for the coming months.

Q6. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend take time during her busy day to observe how the number of building society depositors has increased since she came to power? Does she agree that those 28 million investors set a good example of thrift and that their savings would be whittled away by the inflationary policies advanced by Opposition Members?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The number of building society investors has increased enormously. It is part of the wider distribution of property in terms of housing, personal savings and possibly shares. That is part of the Conservative party's and the Government's fundamental philosophy. I wholly agree with my hon. Friend that under this Government savers, who are so important because without savings we do not have the means of the investment that we wish to see, have had a good deal and will continue to do so, and that under a Labour Government they would have a very bad deal because of the Labour party's inflationary policies, which would rob the savings of their value.

Guinness plc

3.32 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will extend the investigation into the affairs of Guinness in the light of recent events at that company and its corporate advisers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): The inspectors appointed to look into the affairs of Guinness already have wide terms of reference which enable them to investigate any matter concerning Guinness and to require any persons, including its corporate advisers, whom they consider to have relevant information to give evidence to them. As and when I receive any material suggesting misconduct in a matter not concerning Guinness, I will consider it and take any appropriate action. I shall certainly not hesitate to make a further appointment of inspectors if the circumstances justify it.

Mr. Cook: Is the Minister aware that it is believed in the City that as many as 90 million shares in Guinness may have been bought during last year's bid on the basis of improper indemnities by Guinness? Is he aware that the trail of the slush fund with which they were financed leads through some of the most hallowed and established names in the City? Is it not now clear that we are in the middle of the biggest City scandal for a generation, so big that even the public relations talents of Sir Gordon Reece could not keep it under wraps?

Does the Minister recognise that the blame for those events cannot be shuffled off on to a few individuals who have been thrown overboard? Does he recognise that the Government have encouraged the takeover stampede by their relaxed attitude to such bids, of which today's announcement about Pilkingtons is merely the most astonishing? Does he recognise that the Government have achieved only a trickle of prosecutions for fraud in the City in stark contrast to their attitude to fraud in the social security system? Is it not clear that the Government have created a climate in the City in which anything goes?

Can the Minister assure the House that the Department of Trade and Industry inquiry was not discussed when the Prime Minister attended a private lunch last week at the London office of Bain and Co. which employed the financial director who has just been dismissed by Guinness?

Given the scale of the scandal and the £200 million of improper share dealing, why did the public authorities apparently not detect anything wrong until tipped off nine months later by the American authorities? Surely this week's events must have shaken even the Minister's complacency about leaving the regulation of the City to self-regulation by the City? Why does not the Minister admit that we desperately and urgently need an independent public watchdog to restore law and order in the City of London?

Mr. Howard: The House will not expect me to comment on the circumstances presently being inquired into by the independent inspectors who have been appointed to look into the affairs of Guinness. I would not wish to take any step that would be likely to impede their investigations. However, of one thing there can be no doubt: there is no question of keeping anything under wraps. If anything merits investigation, it will be investigated fully, properly, thoroughly and effectively.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has come out with the hoary and entirely misconceived assertion that prosecutions for insider dealing are inadequate. He knows that the record of prosecutions that have taken place since insider dealing was made a criminal offence by this Government leaves something to be desired. That is precisely why we have taken powers of an unprecedented nature in the Financial Services Act 1986. Those powers require people to answer questions put to them by investigators, even if such questions will incriminate them, on pain of punishment for contempt of court. That is a measure of the Government's determination to root out malpractice and misconduct in the City whenever evidence of it comes to our attention.

Sir Alex Fletcher (Edinburgh, Central): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend on the expeditious use he has made of the new powers available to Companies Acts inspectors. As the major question raised by this sordid affair is the legality of the Guinness takeover of Distillers, a matter that may well involve the Director of Public Prosecutions and the courts for many months, what steps does my hon. and learned Friend propose to take to protect the interests of the shareholders involved against any actions by Guinness that may further prejudice their interests as shareholders?

Mr. Howard: I cannot comment on the affairs of Guinness. However, my hon. Friend will appreciate that it is now under new direction and I have no doubt that those responsible will take his comments to heart.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Does the Minister agree that there is already sufficient information in the public domain to make it quite clear that the whole affair stinks and is leaving a dreadful aroma over the whole of the City? Does he also agree that we have seen enough information already to cause deep offence to many people in the City and other parts of the country and, therefore, will he tell the House what resources are being made available to carry out the investigation with the utmost expediency? Can the Minister give some indication as to when he expects the investigation to be completed and say that he will make a full statement to the House when it has been completed and reported to him?

Mr. Howard: The investigations are being conducted by independent inspectors who are not subject to any constraints on the resources available to them. They are well aware of the need to complete the investigations as soon as possible, subject only to the need to carry out a full, thorough and effective inquiry. I fully expect that, as soon as they report, the report will be made public.

Sir Edward Gardner (Fylde): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is offensive in principle and injurious in practice that a famous company such as Pilkingtons that can promise to revive the prosperity of the north of England should be put in peril by the predatory activities of another company such as BTR?

Mr. Speaker: We should have questions about Guinness, not Pilkingtons.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is the Minister aware that we are talking not about a few individuals who have done something wrong but about

some of the most prominent names in the City of London, such as merchant banks and solicitors, as well as those who have responsibilities for the stockbroking aspects of this matter? Dealing with such prominent names is rather different from dealing with a few individuals who might be castigated at some stage in the future.

Is the Minister aware that many of us suspect that none of this might have come out had it not been for information gathered from the United States that set off the whole investigation? Will the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that we are not talking about small matters? We need proper regulation of such problems if the City of London is to hold anything like the place that many of us expected for it when deregulation started.

Mr. Howard: I cannot comment on the source of the information which led to the appointment of inspectors in this case, but I can say that as soon as that information came to the attention of the Department we acted speedily and promptly to appoint independent inspectors to investigate matters.

As for the more general regulation of the City, the regime provided for under the Financial Services Act 1986 will prove to be effective. However, we shall scrutinise with care the report of the Guinness inspectors, and we shall be anxious to learn any lessons from it that we can.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that a private notice question is an extension of Question Time. We have a further private notice question on Pilkington. I shall allow two questions from either side.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend and his inspectors on the way in which they have conducted their duties thus far. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that I was the first Member in the House to raise the matter of how Guinness and Morgan Grenfell were behaving? Does he also agree with the comments that I made on 25 July 1985 regarding that, and the way that the takeover panel had fallen far from the standards required for self-regulation? I support self-regulation, but when one finds that the individuals who are carrying out the duties are falling short, it is right that it should be commented on.

I also draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to the fact that one of the few hon. Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should ask questions, not make statements.

Mr. Walker: Does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is one of the few Opposition Members who have been consistent in this matter and is to be congratulated, unlike others, such as the Leader of the Opposition, who supported Guinness, and who are now being noisy about it?

Mr. Howard: The Opposition have been far from consistent in their approach to these matters, but I can confirm that my hon. Friend has been vigorous in drawing material to the attention of the Department.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): In view of the potential for further job losses if Guinness continues with its present programme, especially in Scotland, will the Minister—or better still the Secretary of State—use his influence to invite Guinness to withdraw its notorious rationalisation programme, especially since it flies in the face of all the pledges that were given by Mr. Saunders during the takeover campaign?

Mr. Howard: These are matters for the company. I am sure that it will take all the circumstances into account in making its decision.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): As during many years of Labour Government absolutely nothing was done to legislate against such scandals, will my hon. and learned Friend reject as humbug what the Opposition say? Nevertheless, does he agree that in recent years some people have entered the City who are long on cunning but short on morals? Is it not a great pity that some of the energy and talent used in shuffling paper in takeover deals is not used to increase existing productive business?

Mr. Howard: For the most part, standards in the City remain high. It is important that we should acknowledge the great contribution which the City makes to our economy, earning £7·5 billion for Britain in net foreign exchange in the latest year for which full figures are available. That makes a significant contribution to our productive economy.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Minister accept that the House is not really persuaded by his argument that this is a little local difficulty involving only insider trading? Will he give us, particularly in Scotland, some assurances on the possibility of going down the line and looking at the activities of the Saunders syndrome in relation to the takeover of Bell's? Many Labour Members, including myself, who were anxious about those activities and received some assurances on headquarters, employment opportunity and so on—I have a substantial Bell's plant in my constituency—would like to know the Government's intention in that regard.

Mr. Howard: I have already described to the House the inspectors' terms of reference, and they are very wide.

BTR and Pilkington Bros.

3.45 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his decision not to refer the bid by BTR for Pilkington to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): I decided, in accordance with the recommendation of the director general of Fair Trading, not to refer the merger between BRT plc and Pilkington Brothers plc to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

I accepted the director general's advice that the merger did not raise significant competition issues. Like the director general, I gave careful consideration to concerns expressed about the effect of the proposed takeover on Pilkington's management philosphy and commercial direction. While accepting that these are important issues, I believe that the shareholders of Pilkington are best placed to make a judgment on them.

Mr. Evans: Is the Secretary of State aware that his decision not to refer the bid has been greeted with widespread dismay by the entire Pilkington work force throughout Great Britain? Will he accept that the involvement of Morgan Grenfell in the bid, which is already deeply involved in the Guinness scandal, means that it would have been in everyone's best interest, particularly the right hon. Gentleman's, if the bid had been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, particularly in view of the 20p surge in Pilkington's share price last night?

The right hon. Gentleman informs the House that there is no competition policy involved. He also states that Pilkington's management philosophy and the commercial direction of the company are best left to the shareholders. Who then speaks for the national interest and for the interests of the work force and its jobs? Pilkington's work force throughout Great Britain intends to step up its compaign against the bid by BTR because it recognises that the bid has no industrial logic. Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman recognise that?

Mr. Channon: I understand and respect the hon. Gentleman's views. Indeed, he came with a deputation to discuss the matter with me and I listened with great care to the arguments that he presented. What I have decided today is entirely consistent with the policy announced as long ago as July 1984 and applied ever since — that references are made primarily on competition grounds. I express no views on the merits of the BTR bid for Pilkington, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's influence and the influence of those for whom he speaks will be powerful in convincing people on how to vote.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate the disappointment of many of the Pilkington employees in the north-west at the non-referral of BTR's bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? However, some Conservative Members appreciate that there was a major lack of a monopoly element that would have provided him with the major ground to do so. Will he bear in mind that, through research and development and hard work, a loyal work force in Pilkington has made that company the premier glass manufacturer in the world? That loyalty will not easily be transferred to a conglomerate run by BTR? Will he ensure that the Pilkington shareholders will, having seen the impressive profit forecasts and long-term stable investment, be allowed to maintain their investment free from the sort of interference that we saw in the Guinness bid for Distillers in the recent past?

Mr. Channon: I understand my hon. Friend's views, and I know that he has strong feelings about this matter. I am sure that he will make his views widely known. It is now for the Pilkington shareholders to weigh up the arguments. They will have to decide on the best long-term prospects for the future of the company. The whole House accepts what my hon. Friend says about the great achievements of Pilkington. The shareholders have an important decision to take about the best long-term prospects for the company.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Secretary of State accept that this decision is inconsistent with the decisions about the Royal Bank of Scotland and Sothebys which were referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Does he agree that other factors should be taken into account and that the rules should be changed so that matters of this sort can be considered? This takeover would be a calamity in an area where already one person in five is out of work. Does he also agree that, when a company has made itself vulnerable because of its investment in research and development, it is unacceptable to allow it to be preyed on by a predator like BTR?

Mr. Channon: The cases cited by the hon. Gentleman were before July 1984. I recall that years ago there were many complaints about the unpredictability of reference policy and a wish to have a predictable set of criteria on which one could judge whether cases were likely to be referred. As I have told the House, what I have said today is entirely consistent with the policy announced in July 1984 that references are made primarily on competition grounds. There have been almost no exceptions to that rule.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Whatever the difficulties facing my right hon. Friend — and they are real difficulties — is he aware that he, the Government and the Conservative party will bitterly rue the day when they seemed to be washing their hands of the future of a firm so outstanding for its technical achievement, its care for its work force and for its contribution to regional policy?

Mr. Channon: I understand my hon. Friend's feelings. He must understand that had a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission taken place it would not necessarily have prevented the takeover of Pilkington by BTR. If the commission makes a recommendation that such a takeover is not against the public interest, I have no power whatever to stop it.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Does the decision not to refer the BTR bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission indicate a preference for expansion by acquisition rather than growth through good research and development, good industrial relations and good marketing?

Mr. Channon: It shows no preference whatever. All these factors are relevant to the Pilkington shareholders in weighing up what they should now do.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): Even if the bid does not come within the narrow confines of a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a great pity if a great manufacturing company like Pilkington which has played such a major part in the industrial life of St. Helens and the whole of the north-west should cease to remain an independent company?

Mr. Channon: It would not be right for me to express a view about its merits. It would also be quite wrong for me to express a preference for one of the two courses that are offered. My right hon. and learned Friend has mentioned an important series of issues which the Pilkington shareholders will have to consider. I am sure that they will weigh carefully what he says.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): All hon. Members from the north-west are well acquainted with Pilkington and know about the work that has been done by its workers and management. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider his earlier answer? Will he put the interests of the community and the people of the north-west before the rather strange concept that competition must decide everything? Is it not clear that some shareholders may think that it is better to get a financial killing than to take account of the interests of local people?

Mr. Channon: I had to decide whether to refer this matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I cannot reconsider the decision that I have announced. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Pilkington's shareholders must weigh up all these arguments and the strong feeling in all parts of the House and outside. I have not announced today that BTR has taken over Pilkington, or that it is likely to do so. All that I have decided to do is not to refer the matter to the commission.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Is this not a further example of the merger mania that seems to be rife? I believe that my right hon. Friend has shown wisdom in deciding to have an immediate review of competition policy. It should also consider the preservation of research and development and the future security of many small and medium-sized firms, which are suppliers to the big ones.

Mr. Channon: I agree that it is right to review competition policy in relation to mergers and restrictive trade practices. My hon. Friend's points and the evidence he gives to that review will be of value in helping me to decide on the issues involved.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I venture a guess that there is a majority opinion in this country, and probably in the House, against the takeover. If the Minister feels that he is under a disability in expressing an opinion about it because of his responsibilities as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, why cannot the Prime Minister call in the chairman of BTR, tell him what the view is and invite him to withdraw his offer?

Mr. Channon: The House has heard what the right hon. Gentleman has said. Surely he will accept that it would be quite wrong for any Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to express a view from this Dispatch Box as to the merits of one side or another when a bid has been made.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, notwithstanding his decision, it will be greeted with dismay by many thousands of Pilkington workers, including those in my constituency? Does he also accept that the views that have been expressed on both sides of the House make it perfectly plain that it is very much in the national interest that companies with a strong regional base should be allowed to flourish and that companies that put maximum effort into research and development and their long-term future should also be allowed to flourish? Will he take an early opportunity to make it perfectly plain to the Pilkington shareholders and others that the Government have considerations of that kind very much in mind?

Mr. Channon: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that companies with a strong regional base should flourish and that it is also important that companies with a strong research and development base should flourish.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): What does the Secretary for State have to say to the 2,500 employees of Barr and Stroud in the Glasgow area whose jobs are geared to research and development and defence contracts? Does he believe that BTR's management philosophy recognises the long-term potential of high-tech as against the short-term advantage of profit?

Mr. Channon: Those involved have to decide. It is not for me to make a judgment between those two management philosophies, if they have been accurately so described by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does not the Secretary of State agree that there comes a point when the state or the Government have a responsibility? There comes a point when the balance between commercial interests and those of the state has to be taken into account. Does not the Secretary of State agree that we have here a takeover bid which makes little or no industrial sense? I agree that it is not a competition point, but it is certainly a point in the public interest. Does he not feel that he has some duty to interfere in this apparently competitive situation so as to ensure that an independent company which has both local and regional interests should be given some protection from the predators that now exist in our industrial society?

Mr. Channon: It is very difficult to reach a decision in a case of this kind. I had to weigh all the factors involved before coming to the decision that I took. It was wholly consistent with decisions taken over many years—that references should be made primarily on competition grounds. It is only reasonable and right that there should be some element of predictability and consistency in these decisions, and I am satisfied that what I have done today is in accordance with that, and is right.

Mr. Speaker: I made a mistake in calling in succession two Members from the Opposition Benches, so I will call two on the Government Benches.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will my right hon. Friend beware of the call from Socialists for control over every takeover bid because that is the first step to bureaucratic

[Mr. Tony Favell]

control over the City and over the country's savings? Having done so, will my right hon. Friend point out to investment managers that they have a responsibility beyond what is described by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor as "short-termism" and have to look to industry, the community and the country when considering whether to back a bid? Will he also point out to the newspapers that by not referring a bid such as Simons only last week to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission he is not giving the green light to those seeking to take over the company?

Mr. Channon: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend says, and I am grateful to him for pointing out these facts. It is now up to the shareholders of Pilkington to weigh up all the arguments put in front of them and to come to a decision as to their best course for the future.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a very dangerous route for any Secretary of State to use the mechanism of referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for seeking to frustrate a takeover bid for reasons other than the national interest, as clearly defined in the Fair Trading Act 1973? Should there not continue to be a clear presumption that shareholders know best how to dispose of their assets?

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): Surely the dominant share of the glass market that Pilkington at present enjoys is itself a ground for referring on grounds of competition policy any bid to take over the ownership of that company. Does the Secretary of State accept that large parts of British industry these days will regard as outstandingly naive his view that shareholders take any other than the short-term view of what affects their share price?

Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that Pilkington provides many jobs in regions where the Government have created large numbers of unemployed and that it has a proven track record in developing high technology? It is his job to protect British jobs and British technology. Why, then, is he standing aside to let a predator pounce—a predator with a proven track record of selling off British technology to foreign companies?

May I press the Secretary of State on the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) that the market plainly knew about his decision yesterday? Is it not clear that, despite the brave talk of his colleague about stamping out insider dealing, his Government have not yet succeeded in stopping the leaks from his own Department?

Mr. Channon: As to the latter part of the hon. Member's question, I have no evidence of that whatsoever. If he has evidence of it, of course I will look at it and refer it to the inspectors.

As to the earlier part of the question, of course I recognise — the whole House does — that Pilkington's record on high technology is extremely good. I also recognise that the company employs a large number of people in the north-west. It is for the shareholders to decide what is in the best long-term interests of the prosperity of Pilkington. I am sure that they will bear very much in mind the excchanges in the House.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of questions?

Mr. Atkinson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I should like your advice. You will recall that, in answering questions about Guinness, the Minister of State, in answer to a point put to him by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Sir A. Fletcher), who asked him to look after the interests of the shareholders of Guinness, nodded approval. Similarly, the Secretary of State, throughout his answers on Pilkington, has replied in a similar way by agreeing that he and, indirectly, the House have a responsibility to ensure the integrity of shareholders' interests——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for movements of the head or for questions or answers given from the Back Benches or the Front Benches.

Mr. Atkinson: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. I am seeking your advice as to what responsibility the House has when it comes to guaranteeing anything to shareholders. It is under no obligation to them whatsoever, and the Minister of State ought to reconsider the nod that he gave.

Mr. Speaker: I have no doubt that there will be debates on this matter and that these are legitimate points to raise, but they are not matters of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In my question I suggested that the Leader of the Opposition had supported Guinness. I should have referred to the leader of the Liberal party.

Business of the House

4.7 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 JANUARY—Progress on remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 20 JANUARY—Opposition Day (5th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Divided Nation — Failure of the Government's Economic Policies".

Debate on a motion on EC documents relating to broadcasting. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 21 JANUARY—Completion of remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 22 JANUARY—There will be a debate on the Royal Air Force on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 23 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 26 JANUARY—Opposition Day (6th Allotted Day). There will be debate on an Opposition motion, the subject for debate to be announced.

[Tuesday 20 January

Relevant European Documents

(a) 8227/84 A Common Market for Broadcasting

(b) 6739/86 Proposed harmonisation of Member States' Legislation affecting broadcasting

Relevant reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 5-iv (1984-85), para 3

(b) HC 21-xxiv (1985-86), para 2]

Mr. Kinnock: Following the most recent exchanges in the House, will the right hon. Gentleman not accept that national trading and industrial interests are not best served by conglomerates gobbling up productive and technologically progressive British companies, and that the matter is a fitting one for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? It is, in any event, a suitable subject for debate, and I wonder whether the Leader of the House could give an undertaking now that the Government will shortly provide time for consideration of this and related issues?

As the right hon. Gentleman has just announced, the House will give two days next week to the remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill, which is obviously very complex, which will provide further dictatorial powers for the Government, breaks promises about rights and safeguards given by previous Ministers and which seeks to set the Secretary of State above the normal process of the law. All that surely justifies proper provision for discussion in Committee, not the indecent and inefficient haste with which the Government are trying to shove the Bill through the House. Will the Leader of the House at least give an undertaking now that further days in future weeks will be given to this Bill so that some semblance of proper consideration can be given to the complex matters within it?

We note that next week time will be made available for a debate on the Royal Air Force. Will the Leader of the House give an indication of when we may expect a debate on the Royal Navy, especially in view of the considerable concern about the implications for defence of the continuing reduction of the British merchant fleet which has occasioned much comment in the House and elsewhere?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that yesterday the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled rightly advised that in these savage and unprecedented winter conditions people should keep their heating on and keep warm? Is the Leader of the House aware that if they are to take that advice in practice, the poorest people must have their fear of big bills removed? Will he make provision for a Government statement next week to give assurances that they will obtain from the gas and electricity boards a guarantee that poor people, such as pensioners, who keep their heating on in these severe conditions, and who have difficulty in paying their bills for the current quarter, will not be disconnected as a consequence of their difficulty in meeting the cost for weeks like this?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The information is already available.

Mr. Kinnock: No, it is not, you ignoramus. I was not referring to you, Mr. Speaker, but to the ignoramus on the Government side.

On a related matter, while we welcome the Government's recently announced support for charities which are helping the homeless, will the Leader of the House now provide time for an urgent debate on the general plight of the homeless, both in the current arctic conditions and in less inclement weather, and on the provision that is necessary to help them?

Finally, on this week's business, since we have the opportunity, there are strong indications that the payroll vote will be called out tomorrow to try to defeat the Bill being put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), which is intended to provide help for pensioners who are having difficulty in meeting their licence fee. Can the right hon. Gentleman, whom we recognise to be truly a right honourable man, give an undertaking that he will make all efforts to discourage the mobilisation of the Government's official forces against a private Member's Bill?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Last point first, please.

Mr. Biffen: Of the six points that were put to me by the Leader of the Opposition, I shall happily take the last one first. Of course, I note what he says about tomorrow's voting arrangements. He alerts me of arrangements which I have no doubt may have existed in a complex fashion over many years. I dare say those who study the Crossman diaries can get the most authentic exhibition of their working. What has been said will have been heard, and tomorrow we shall see.

As to the fifth point, the matter concerning the homeless, that can be considered through the usual channels. The right hon. Gentleman also sought a statement on the policy of gas and electricity authorities in respect of disconnection for those who will have incurred extra high payments during recent days. I shall refer his anxiety that there should be a statement on the point.

Of course, I understand his concern that we should have a debate reasonably soon upon the Royal Navy. Perhaps more than any other of the service debates it

[Mr. Biffen]

would enable one to consider the nuclear question of British forces. I think I can assure him that a day will be available fairly soon.

Perhaps experience of next week will show us that the Local Government Finance Bill is a wise and constructive piece of action on the part of my right hon. Friend, which will rescue local authorities from what would otherwise have been an embarrassing situation. I hope that my generosity will prove more valid than the right hon. Gentleman's gloom-laden analysis of the future of that legislation. May I say once again that, through the usual channels, we can reconcile any anxieties on that point.

On the matter that he raised initially about monopolies and mergers within British industry and commerce, that will clearly be covered by the debate next Tuesday but I understand that he is anxious about it in a wider context. Again, perhaps that is something that we could consider through the usual channels.

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): Since we are in the season of debates about the armed services of the Crown, will my right hon. Friend consider allocating a day for a discussion about what is often called the fourth arm of our national defence, the Merchant Navy? There is great anxiety in all quarters of the House, from the point of view both of defence and of the economy, about the proportion of it that is owned and registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Biffen: My right hon. Friend, with great authority, makes a point on the Merchant Navy. He will have heard the Leader of the Opposition suggest that the debate on the Royal Navy was important precisely because it could embrace those considerations. I shall certainly take that into account.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): When does the Leader of the House intend to announce the date of the Budget?

Secondly, will he note that the answers that the Prime Minister gave to me on Tuesday and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) today about empty houses in London being an answer to the problem of the homeless require further investigation by Ministers to establish the legislative and administrative barriers against their being occupied? What is needed from the Government, in addition to the welcome funds, is the release of heated public buildings to deal with the immediate crisis.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Hear, hear.

Mr. Steel: Perhaps we could start with county hall across the way.

Mr. Biffen: I note the alliance that has already been picked up by the right hon. Gentleman on this point. I am sure that he is now seeking to ditch the alliance, but we all understand his difficulties. Of course, I shall see that the points made by the right hon. Gentleman are related to the relevant Members of the Treasury Bench.

As to the first point, I am not in a position to make an announcement this afternoon but I appreciate that there is concern that the date is known as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Ignoramus or not, it is my understanding that gas and electricity boards have already given an assurance that they will not disconnect the supplies to pensioners between November and March. Irrespective of the response from the Leader of the Opposition, may I support him in making a call to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for a debate at an early date on the takeover mania that has seized the country? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the decision now lay with the shareholders. Bearing in mind that institutions in the City, sadly, are major shareholders, and that their perspective is the short term rather than the long term, the sooner we discuss the best interests of the country and of manufacturing industry, the better.

Mr. Biffen: Of course, I take account of my hon. Friend's anxiety that there should be a debate upon monopolies and mergers. For myself, I would be happy to be called a Tory ignoramus. I would be fearful if I were called a Tory intellectual.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): In regard to the request by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, and by the Tory ignoramus, for an early debate on mergers, does the Leader of the House agree that there is even more urgency following the pusillanimous and lamentable display of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in relation to Pilkingtons, which is a world leader in its industry? Does he not agree that there is urgency, as we cannot afford to lose firms that are world leaders, because we have not got many of them?

Mr. Biffen: I strongly repudiate the hon. Gentleman's description of my right hon. Friend. I believe that my right hon. Friend set out to the House the framework which governed his decision in a way that was courageous and helpful in the consideration of the argument. As to the wider request for a debate upon monopolies and mergers, I take note of it.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): May I first reassure my right hon. Friend that in respect of the House his intellect competes only with his wit? He will know that within the last three or four years the Select Committee on Science and Technology in another place produced a most important report, as a result of which there is now an annual report to Parliament on civil research and development. He will also be aware that within the past two days that same Committee has published a most disturbing report on civil research and development in the United Kingdom in which it called for enlarged understanding and attached importance to the whole question of science and technology at all levels of Government. As one of those levels is undoubtedly this House, may we have an early opportunity to discuss an office of technology assessment? Could not that best be debated in the context of a general debate on the annual report to Parliament?

Mr. Biffen: I will most certainly consider that point.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): The Leader of the House will have seen early-day motion No. 162.

[That this House congratulates The International Liaison Committee for the Peaceful and Independent Reunification of Korea in organising the International Conference in Pyongyang for the declaration of the Korean peninsula as a nuclear free peace zone; notes that the basing of 40,000 United States troops and the deployment of nuclear missiles on Korean soil is a major obstacle for peace talks in the area; calls for the withdrawal of all American troops and nuclear missiles; and calls upon Her Majesty's

Government to support the campaign for the de-nuclearisation and peaceful re-unification of the Korean peninsular.]

and early-day motion No. 163:

[That this House deplores the further repression of human rights in South Korea by the arrest of 1,400 students at Konguk University, the invasion of the University Campus by 7,000 members of the military and police forces and the wounding of 70 people, many of them mysteriously; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to protest at this violation of freedom to the South Korean Government and to seek the release of Mr. Kim Dae Jung, the leader of the democratic opposition.]

As the Government support both these motions in principle and Her Majesty's warships have recently visited South Korea, is that not an example of double standards? Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence on that issue?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman might be prepared to try his hand at Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions next week.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): My right hon. Friend will have heard me refer before to early-day motion No. 310, which refers to small dairy farms.

[That this House believes that should a reduction in milk quotas be necessary, the first 200,000 litres of a United Kingdom holding should not be included in any calculations, thus helping to ensure the future of the small family farms which have done so much for the British countryside.]

Can he give some idea when the final decision will be made on the dairy inspection charges? When will we get an opportunity to debate them in the House?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot provide the information that my hon. Friend understandably seeks. However, I shall contact my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to see whether he can be more forthcoming.

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): In view of the massive concern about the Government's policy on the care of mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients in the community and in view of the fact that the Select Committee on Social Services report was presented a year ago, will he provide time for a debate on the report at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Biffen: I will certainly consider that matter and how that can be considered in the context of the Government's response to the report and decide whether there is time available for such a debate.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Will my right hon. Friend give priority to the introduction of the resolution on short speeches from Back Benchers because that would be a great benefit? Will he do that at an early opportunity so that it can be quickly promulgated, with or without the amendment?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend will have noted that the motion to provide for that now stands on the Order Paper. It has been amended and I hope that a debate can take place quite soon.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House read the report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests which deals with the declaraition — or, rather, lack of a declaration — of interests by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell)? Can we not have a debate on the matter so that the House can take a decision and secure the fullest possible enforcement of the register?

Mr. Biffen: I have only just received a copy of the report. I shall study it and consider how it will stand with the other matters that compete for the attention of the House.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): We all know how concerned my right hon. Friend is for the welfare of all right hon. and hon. Members of the House. The House is becoming increasingly concerned about the Leader of the Opposition, not only indulging in a punch-up outside a Pakistani chippy in Ealing, but seeking yesterday to mug my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled. I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is subject to much greater pressures and provocations. Perhaps he has some advice or assistance for the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman asking for a debate on this matter?

Mr. Marlow: Perhaps we could have a debate on this matter and my right hon. Friend could then give his views in much greater detail than he can now.

Mr. Biffen: I have a kind of institutional affection for the Leader of the Opposition and he and I are both great admirers of Aneurin Bevan. I remember Aneurin Bevan once describing Hugh Gaitskell as a "desiccated calculating machine." I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition is anxious to persuade us that he is not in that tradition.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement next week on the outcome of the discussions in the United States of America between British and Argentine officials on the future of the Falklands?

Mr. Biffen: I will most certainly convey the request for such a statement to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): In view of the postponement of this week's Opposition debate on the so-called north-south divide, will my right hon. Friend consider whether there should be some minimum period of notice beyond which the subject for an Opposition day ought not to be changed?

Mr. Biffen: Clearly, that is a factor for consideration. However, I thought that we did rather well out of that one.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Leader of the House aware that on Tuesday, during Social Service questions, the Minister's announcement on cold weather payments resulted in a kind of change of legislation? In view of the fact that it may not be as clear each week whether the minus 1·5 deg C point will be reached for the whole week, will it not be necessary—in light of the precedent that has been set by the Minister of State — for a weekly statement to be made by the Government, preferably on a Monday, to tell the House exactly what will happen in respect of weather payments? If not, it means that what happened last week was a farce. It means that legislation has been disrupted for only one occasion when it was uncomfortable for the Prime Minister and the Government.

[Mr. Skinner]

Can we have an assurance from the Leader of House that a Minister will make a statement on weather payments, one way or the other, every week so that the House can be clear, and that the precedent will be proceeded with?

Mr. Biffen: No.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Leader of the House aware that the answer that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is bound to confirm the strong impression that Ministers have been told to be present tomorrow to destroy my Bill? Is he further aware that such a manoeuvre is deeply offensive to many pensioners on low incomes who believe that the rights and wrongs of my Bill should be debated? They see no reason why Cabinet Ministers on very large salaries should be told to come here and destroy the measure.

Mr. Biffen: The very nature of the hon. Gentleman's remarks persuades me that there is nothing that I can say that would change his mind.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): In the light of the publication yesterday by the Law Commission about the possibilities of eradicating gazumping, does my right hon. Friend agree that that is an obnoxious practice and that a debate, if not next week, then at the soonest possible opportunity, on the Law Commissioners' report would be greatly welcomed by many first-time buyers?

Mr. Biffen: I understand the importance that my hon. Friend attaches to this topic and that feeling is widely shared in the House. I cannot guarantee that there will be Government time available in the near future for such a debate. Perhaps he might consider trying to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): In view of the Government's delayed identification or recognition of the north-south divide, and in spite of whatever economic debates take place in the House next week, will the Leader of the House make room for a debate on that question, which has been highlighted again today by the decision taken in the House with regard to Pilkington?

Mr. Biffen: The Leader of the Opposition has underlined the significance of a debate upon merger and monopoly policy more generally and that has been echoed in all parts of the House, including the Conservative Benches. I will add the voice of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), to those voices.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): As we have all suffered yet another petrol price rise, does my right hon. Friend think that the time is now right to have an urgent debate on what is obviously price collusion and a price cartel operated by the petrol companies? Does he accept that there is a need for the matter to be referred to the Office of Fair Trading? We cannot shop around if the prices that all the petrol companies are charging are the same.

Mr. Biffen: I shall refer the anxieties expressed by my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion No. 434?

[That this House urges the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to refer the BTR bid for Pilkingtons to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.]

That early-day motion has ben signed by 76 hon. and right hon. Members from all parts of the House. As hon. Members have expressed strong views about the bid, will the Leader of the House make time available in the next fortnight for a debate about the principles involved in the bid so that all hon. Members can make their feelings plain to the shareholders of Pilkington and say what they think that they should do about the BTR bid?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said and his point is very much on the lines of the question originally put by his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I will take account of the depth of feeling that exists on this matter.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): In view of the number of references to self-regulation, can my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on that subject and, in doing so, will he invite the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate, giving examples from his personal capacity for self-regulation, including on the pavement outside Indian restaurants and his recent behaviour in the House?

Mr. Biffen: Some topics have such a durability that I shall be dealing with them as we approach the months of Heaven knows what towards the end of the year. I take note of what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Ignoring all the ignorami, can the Leader of the House, at a time when we are considering the plight of the elderly, consider the plight of those men who are not quite so old but who are suffering unnecessarily because they are not permitted voluntarily to retire at the age of 60? Are we to have a debate on this extraordinary anomaly of our system which forces men to remain in jobs when they are desperate to retire, while so many of our constituents are desperate for the jobs that they are occupying?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. and learned Gentleman raises a matter that has great economic and social implications. I cannot guarantee Government time to debate it soon, but the House would enjoy listening to the hon. and learned Gentleman in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the refusal of the Department of Trade and Industry to refer the takeover of the Ault and Wiborg paint factory in my constituency by Berger, where 220 jobs are involved? Will he accept that it is important to have a debate on competition policy? Failing that, could we have an early statement about the Government's position on competition policy as a result of their current review?

Mr. Biffen: I can understand my hon. Friend's anxiety, particularly in the light of his zealous concern for his constituency interest. I shall see what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry knows of that anxiety.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Leader of the House recall that, shortly before Christmas, in a series of business questions, I asked for a debate on the prison system, and he showed some sympathy with my point of view? Since then, we have had yet another riot in a Scottish prison. Have not imprisonment and the terms

and conditions in prison, both in Scotland and in England and Wales, become a matter of public concern? Should not the House debate the subject soon?

Mr. Biffen: I have sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, which I manifested before Christmas. My sympathy grows, but the prospect of a debate in Government time tends to diminish as we go through this time of the year. I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Given that the official Opposition are being granted their second Supply day debate in seven days, and that we are debating the RAF next week, and bearing in mind my right hon. Friend's well-known charitable disposition, would it not be fair to grant the alliance a Supply day so that we can debate its defence policies and give it an opportunity to climb out of the trough demonstrated in an ITN poll, which shows them winning not a single Conservative seat seven years into a Conservative Government?

Mr. Biffen: I note my hon. Friend's interest that the alliance parties should have more formal political time than at present, and as he is in a position to monitor how effective that is in reducing their impact, I shall be guided by him.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend is aware, as all of us are, that this week bureaucracy has been beaten by ministerial action. Can he bring forward a debate so that we can see how the workings of the DHSS in the applications for mobility and attendance allowances could be eased in the same way, so that those who are ill and sick, whose letters fill our postbags regularly, do not have to wait the average length of time, between nine months and one year, between application, medical examination, adjudication and result?

Mr. Biffen: I suspect that my postbag is not dissimilar from that of my hon. Friend, so I can understand what motivates his point. I shall refer this matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Labour councils are using town halls as political headquarters from which they are already waging the next general election campaign, using ratepayers' money? Can we have another local government Bill quickly to outlaw this practice once and for all?

Mr. Biffen: If all that is implied by my hon. and learned Friend is true, there is not much value for money in the context of current political fortunes, but I shall consider carefully what he says and refer it to the relevant Minister.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to read early-day motions Nos. 400 and 414?

[That this House notes that the United States Government intends to impose a punitive 200 per cent. tariff increase to kill Beefeater, Tanquaray and Bombay gin exports to the United States whilst also threatening many hundreds of United Kingdom jobs; notes that the origins of the dispute with the European Community are with grain and other agricultural products; and calls upon all Governments involved to solve this dispute within the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and not destroy three famous British export brands which United States citizens wish to purchase.]

[That this House expresses its deep concern at the proposal from the United States administration to impose a 200 per cent. increase in duty on a number of products imported from the European Economic Community; fears in particular that this would have an adverse impact on exports from the United Kingdom of Tanqueray and Beefeater gin; believes that the consequences on price, export levels, and employment would be severe; and urges Her Majesty's Government to do everything in its power to ensure a reconsideration by the United States within the next three weeks.]

These draw attention to the threat posed to the British gin industry by the United States Government, which proposes to put a 200 per cent. increase in tariff on imported gin if the EEC does not make concessions to the United States grain industry. Will my right hon. Friend give time for an urgent debate on this matter, which poses such a serious threat to important British exporters?

Mr. Biffen: The Treasury Bench would immediately be at one with my hon. Friend in being anxious not merely about gin but about the wider issue of a trade war between north America and western Europe. I shall refer my hon. Friend's remarks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but again this could feature as an Adjournment debate.

Orders of the Day

Coal Industry Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Ordered,

That the Bill be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses, Clause 1, Schedule 1, Clauses 2 and 3, Schedule 2, Clauses 4 to 10, new Schedules and Schedule 3.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

New Clause 1

REMOVAL OF MONOPOLY

'(1) In subsection (1) of section 1 of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 there shall be substituted for subparagraph *(a)* the words "working and getting coal in Great Britain"

(2) In subsection (2) of that section the words "to the exclusion of any other person" in subparagraph *(a)* shall be deleted.

(3) Subsection (1) of section 36 of that Act shall be deleted.

(4) Subparagraphs *(a)* and *(b)* of subsection (2) of that section shall be deleted.'.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.36 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 1 seeks to remove the monopoly that the National Coal Board enjoys, and has enjoyed for 40 years since the original nationalisation Act of 1946. That Act charged the board with the duty of securing the efficient development of the industry, and 40 years on it should be obvious to everyone that the record is not good. Almost every year of the NCB's existence has seen pits close and miners made redundant. During all that time the NCB has lurched deeper and deeper into debt and become more and more dependent on the goodwill of the Government and the support of the taxpayer. A whole series of Bills such as this have been enacted to transfer more and more of our taxes to the NCB, in return for which the taxpayer has seen little.

The NCB is not simply financially bankrupt, but is politically and socially bankrupt as well, and the reasons for this deserve some examination. It should be obvious to any student of the coal industry that the board has been living, since 1946, and certainly up to the recent strike, almost in a world of its own, protected from the real world, indifferent to, and oblivious, even contemptous, of the real disciplines of the energy market place. Had it not been so, we would have seen, long before the tragic strike of 1984-85, much better management, much more modern industrial relations and, above all, greater security, certainty for those who work in the industry, the miners, who for 40 years have been denied the opportunity to work in a successful and profitable industry and the chance of any share in that success and in profits.

The monopoly has insulated the Coal Board from reality. It is the privilege of the board alone to work and extract coal in the United Kingdom, and nobody else shall be allowed to do so other than with its permission, and that is at the heart of the industry's failure. Such a monopoly and privilege is not only wrong in principle, but has been disastrous in practice. There are no such monopolies in other countries. Private mining exists, and other countries do not have to bail out their mining industries or coal boards. During the past 20 or 30 years they have not had to divert resources to finance Hobart House which might otherwise have been spent on roads, schools and hospitals. Indeed, the mining industries of those countries have made a contribution to roads, schools and hospitals, as have our other extractive industries, instead of diverting resources away from them.

It is high time that the privilege and monopoly of the board was reviewed by the House and, after such a review, removed. I only regret that the Bill promulgates, yet again, the conspiracy between the Department of Energy and Hobart House further to defraud taxpayers of resources which they would wish to see spent on what is most needed, such as roads and hospitals, rather than on keeping uneconomic pits open for social reasons.

I regret that the Bill does not establish the basis of a new Act to supersede the 1946 Act and lay down the lines on which a restructured industry might be made ready for the 1990s and opened up to fresh opportunities, new investment and, above all, wider ownership.

The objective of removing the monopoly is threefold. First, it would allow private investment in the industry. It is clear that the industry, as constituted after the strike, will require substantial capital investment for several years. Yesterday's White Paper showed that capital investment of £648 million will be required in the next financial year, and £698 million in the two subsequent years up to the end of 1990.

Even if the board becomes profitable, it is still, because of its monopoly position, denied access to the private capital markets and is not encouraged even to consider the possibility of joint ventures with private industry.

We are speaking, not of selling parts of the industry or profitable investments, such as Selby, but of seeking ways to finance the Selbys of the future and to encourage fresh private capital into the industry through joint ventures and partnerships and through the sort of Phoenix schemes that we have devised for the steel industry.

The second purpose of removing the monopoly is to encourage the existing private opencast sector. That is a small but important sector, employing 1,500 people. My hon. Friends the Members for Erewash (Mr. Rost) and for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) will, if they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, make a powerful case for saying that the limits on this sector, which are at present imposed and controlled, not by the Department of Energy or the county councils on planning grounds, but by itself, should be removed, and that further opencast development should take place, providing cheaper coal and a continuing competitive stimulus to the Coal Board.

The third aim of removing the monopoly is to encourage the private small mines sector. It is not generally known that small private mines are allowed to flourish in the Coal Board's back yard, provided that they employ not more than 30 men, rather as private agriculture is tolerated in the Soviet Union. There are 160 small mines in Britain and, interestingly, they are in areas of high unemployment. There are 90 small mines in Wales, 29 in the north-east and 20 in Scotland. They produce a formidable output of 800,000 tonnes of coal a year and employ about 2,000 people, but the cardinal point that also applies to the private opencast sector is that it would like to employ more men. It is willing and ready to employ more.

It is extraordinary that in areas of high unemployment, under a Government who favour the development of small

businesses, there is a Coal Board structure which denies other mines and operations the opportunity to employ more men, even when they are already successful.

It is the view of the small mine owners, given in evidence to the Select Committee on Energy, that employment would expand significantly and considerably if this monopoly restraint were lifted. Anyone who is in any doubt about that should read memorandum 33 to the Select Committee on Energy, which is a damning indictment of the evils of monopoly and an eloquent testimony to the possibilities and opportunities that exist if this great industry is opened up to greater and further competition.

4.45 pm

The question is not whether the Opposition will defend this monopoly — obviously they will defend it, just as they defended the monopoly of the National Union of Mineworkers — but whether the Government have the courage and the vision to tackle the monopoly of the Coal Board in the same way as the Bill tackles the monopoly of the NUM.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I do not support the provisions of new clause 1, but this is a welcome debate for the House and I am pleased that the hon. Members for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) have tabled the new clause.

The issue needs to be opened up and examined. No one in this House or in the country would want to protect a monopoly unless there was an absolutely overwhelming case for doing so. I am not sure that the case for a monopoly in the coal industry is any longer justified, but a debate on that should take place and we should examine the matter carefully. No doubt when the Act was put on the statute book against the background of private exploitation that had taken place in the preceding decades, the case for a monopoly was overwhelming. In the atmosphere and circumstances of that day we can understand and support what brought the industry into the modern, post-war era.

The National Coal Board has undoubtedly made a major contribution to Britain's industry and to the communities in which it has operated. However, if we look at the wording of the 1946 Act, which the hon. Member for Darlington and his colleagues seek to amend, we see that it is a product of the 1940s and of the atmosphere and circumstances that existed at that time. The Act states:

"working and getting the coal in Great Britain"

will be carried out

"to the exclusion . . . of any other person . . . searching and boring for coal in Great Britain"

shall be carried out

"to the exclusion of any other person."

There could not be a more abrupt and crude description of a monopoly than those words.

The Act then mentions the provision of licences. I wish to dwell on that for a moment, because it appears that putting the power to give licences in the hands of the National Coal Board is quite inappropriate. Oil licences are issued and the royalties are paid to the Government. The appropriate body to issue licences should be the Government, not an operator. That does not mean that the Government should give licences to anyone and everyone. It seems wrong that an operating business should have the royalties and the right to give licences in this way, even if it is a monopoly. The Government may decide to give what will be British Coal a monopoly to operate in this sphere, but it is no longer appropriate that that body should have the power to give licences and take royalties, even if it was appropriate in 1946. Therefore, I see a case for changing the provision to give the Government the right to do that.

Opposition Members who have had the association with the co-operative movement that I have had will believe that there are forms of ownership other than state ownership which could and, indeed do, make a success of running industrial enterprises in many spheres. Some hon. Members may even want to see co-ownership for organisations carrying out mining activities. During the dispute it was often suggested that some loss-making pits should be given to those who work in them. I was not in favour of that. If we give pits to anybody, let us give profitable pits to those who work in them, so that they can make a success of them. At present the Government do not have the power to do that because they do not issue the licences.

I can see a case for considering that argument seriously and for transferring the power to give licences and to fix and take royalties to the Government. That would be more consistent with the provision for issuing licences for extracting minerals in other spheres and, certainly, for extracting oil. The country has benefited from that system in other spheres and I see no reason why that provision should not be transferred.

I hope that the debate will continue. There is no inherent reason why the coal industry should be a monopoly industry. Because of its set-up, it could be argued that every pit should operate as a separate commercial entity. I would not go anything like as far as that, but certainly there could be three state enterprises. If Labour Members do not want the coal industry to go into private ownership, we could have different public sector corporations, and in that way we could have competition and compare the operation and efficiency of different parts of the mining industry.

We have seen mining succeed in much more difficult spheres, such as in tin. That has been carried out successfully and efficiently and it may be helpful to have that sort of competiton in coal mining.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The hon. Gentleman spoke of different types of public competition. Is he aware that every colliery in the British coalfield works on the basis of price per tonne at that particular colliery and is in competition with other collieries, and has been since vesting day in 1947?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: That is a different consideration because it does not take into account the full free-standing commercial set-up of the sort that I am suggesting. Now is not the time to discuss that.

The coal industry has been in considerable turmoil in recent times. From both the national and industrial point of view now is not the time to embark upon a major change such as is being proposed. That does not mean that the 1946 statute should be set in concrete for ever and a day. Therefore, I welcome the opportunity to widen the debate and hope that it will proceed further and that we shall have many more discussions on this issue.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I support the amendment and the way in which it was proposed, and hope that my

[Mr. Peter Rost]

hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) will press it to a vote. My only regret is that the debate is necessary.

It is extraordinary that, after six years of a Government who believe in and have put into practice policies of competition, private enterprise, incentives and lower energy costs, they should have evaded amending the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946, which provides such a stranglehold over what limited private sector mining has been allowed to persist. The Government should and could have removed the worst abuses of the Coal Board's monopoly long ago.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, there are about 160 small pits, producing about 1 per cent. of the deep-mined coal and employing about 2,000 people. Many are miners' co-operatives. They produced a great deal more in 1960, but since then the restrictions of the statutes have held them back. The Energy Select Committee's memorandum, for which evidence was taken from the Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain, is a most damning indictment of and explanation why the private sector has been so clobbered. For years the FSMGB has argued for the removal of the worst restriction in that Act — that a deep mine in the private sector should be allowed to employ only 30 men.

I visited one of those small pits in Staffordshire for a day to find out exactly what the problems were. It came to light that, because it was allowed to employ only 30 miners, it could operate only two shifts. It wants to work three shifts to optimise its potential and, indeed, employ more miners. There are plenty of miners looking for jobs since the board has been closing pits, but they cannot be employed in such pits. It is not practicable for the mine to split its 30 work force over three shifts as it would not be viable to operate a shift with only 10 men; at least 15 are needed. The result is that the pit is restricted from increasing its output, providing additional jobs and getting on with it.

Plenty of other small mines and sites could and would employ 40 or even 100 men. Those jobs could be created, many of them in workers-miners' co-operatives, but the Act prevents that.

Mr. Alec Woodall (Hemsworth): How many miners made redundant by the Coal Board are working at the small mine that the hon. Gentleman visited?

Mr. Rost: I understand that British coal miners are only too willing to be employed in the mining industry, if they have the opportunity.

The Government are achieving a massive transformation of the British economy, creating new jobs and encouraging small enterprises, but in this case we are reluctant to set free an industry which could make a bigger contribution to the national economy than it is at present. Those small mines, many of which are co-operatives, wish to reduce their operating costs by operating more sensibly, but they are prevented from doing so by this stupid 1946 monopolies legislation that states that they should be allowed to employ only 30 men.

There is evidence that whole areas of potential coal mining are being artificially sterilised by that restrictive legislation.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Woodall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rost: I hope that Opposition Members will allow me to make my brief speech so that they may then have the opportunity to make theirs.

There are whole areas with mining potential that the Coal Board does not want because they are too small. They could be developed as small and medium-sized mines if private enterprises were allowed to employ more than 30 men, but they are not. That is restricting the coal industry's economy and job opportunities. How can Government —this Government of all Governments—justify the fact that they have ignored this abuse that should have been dealt with long ago?

5 pm

There is evidence on record of pits which the Coal Board has closed but which the private sector would have liked to have taken over, or existing miners or management would have liked to have taken on. Such pits would have been made viable and economic if the private sector had been given that opportunity, but because it would have involved the employment of more than 30 miners they were not allowed that opportunity.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Where is the evidence of those pits being offered to the miners who would have taken them over and made them profitable? The only time when miners wanted to do that they were refused. I am aware of the small mine that the hon. Gentleman has visited, but can he tell us how many present small mining operations do not employ 30 men even though they are allowed to do so?

Mr. Rost: The hon. Gentleman has proved my case. They do not employ that number because they are not given the opportunity — [HON. MEMBERS: "Of course they are."] If the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) wants evidence from me he may study some of my voluminous files afterwards if he wished to do so.

There are other restrictions that ought to have been removed long ago and not just restrictions on the numbers employed. I refer to the issue of licences, which the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) referred to so eloquently. The issuing of licences to the private sector is under the patronage of its major monopoly competitor, the Coal Board. The board exercises that patronage in an arbitrary and rather restrictive fashion. It is the judge and jury. What is even worse is that there is no independent right of appeal when there is an abuse or alleged abuse. The private sector wants a licence but can be stopped by the Coal Board. That is unjustifiable and should have been amended long ago.

A third restrictive factor should have been removed long ago. It is bad enough that the private sector is inhibited and restricted by the original statutes, but on top of that it must pay royalties per tonne, not to the Government or the Department of Energy but to the Coal Board—its major competitor.

In the deep mine sector that royalty works out as the equivalent of £1 per tonne. That is really quite extraordinary. The Government and not British Coal should be the custodian of coal reserves and all mines should pay a royalty to the Government in the same way as the oil and gas exploration agencies pay a royalty. There should be no restrictions on output or manpower.

I believe that if we study the past 40 years it will be clearly seen that there has been an abuse of monopoly and that that has been condoned by Government. I am ashamed to say that Government have failed. They should have put this right long ago.

In its 1983 report the Monopolies and Mergers Commission said that private operations provided a valuable element of competition and should be encouraged as a means of increasing the efficiency of the NCB. We have moved a little since then but certainly not in the right direction.

The royalties that the private sector has to pay to the Coal Board out of its profitable operations provide part of the subsidy for the board's loss-making operations. That is quite unacceptable.

The other area of the private sector coal industry that has been graciously allowed to continue in a modest little way is opencast mining. Private opencast sites provide about 10 per cent. of our opencast coal — about 1·4 million tonnes—and employ about 1,500 people. That is only a fraction of the opencast coal produced. The rest is mined by the Coal Board. Over the years we have had voluminous evidence to suggest that the private sector has the potential to produce more and employ more people if it were allowed to mine the smaller opencast reserves that the Coal Board and the Opencast Executive do not want to know about. Once again, there is a restriction because the licensing power is under the patronage of the Coal Board. The main complaint that the National Association of Licensed Opencast Operators has put to Government over many years is that the monopoly producer, the Coal Board, is also the regulator for the other producers.

The 1983 report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission recommended that the limit of production for opencast mines in the private sector—standing at 25,000 tonnes a year — should be raised to at least 100,000 tonnes. We now have some flexibility but it is still up to the Coal Board to decide whether to allow a licence to exceed the 25,000 tonnes. That is a ludicrously small amount. In practice it means that potential opencast mines that the Coal Board does not wish to operate because they are too small but which nevertheless could be developed by the private sector are not tapped because the limit on private sector production has not been increased to at least 100,000 tonnes a year.

What is even worse is that private sector opencast mines have to pay a royalty, not to the Government or to the Department of Energy but to the Coal Board. That royalty is about £16 per tonne. The royalty that the private opencast mine industry has to pay to the Coal Board is higher than the Coal Board's profits per tonne from its own opencast operations. That says something about the relative efficiency of the two sectors.

How can such monopolistic restrictions be justified by the Government? The royalty penalty that the private sector must pay to the Coal Board also limits the number of potential sites that can be exploited. There are many potential sites in the private sector that could be profitable but are not developed because the £16 royalty must be taken into account.

I ask the Minister to consider how much coal the Coal Board could profitably produce if it did not receive these payments from the private sector or instead had to pay a £16 per tonne royalty on its production. I shall be interested to hear his answer.

Private opencast operators are afraid to complain—this is one of the worst abuses of the monopoly—because they fear that they will be victimised and refused further licences from the board if they do not accept the few crumbs that are given to them under the patronage scheme. The private sector has to take this lying down. There is evidence to support that. That position is quite unacceptable.

I cannot understand why nothing has been done to amend the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946. That measure has represented a shameful restriction on competition and employment opportunities for miners. It is holding back the production of cheaper coal and preventing a further addition to the creation of wealth in Britain, which our economy desperately needs. I suggest that the time for action is long past.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Next year it will be 50 years since a Conservative Government nationalised the coal industry in Britain. I greatly appreciated the spirited defence of capitalism by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth), but, despite what he said, it was a Conservative Government who nationalised this country's coal reserves in the Coal Act 1938, which set up the Coal Commission. Thus, it is 50 years since we began nationalisation, although it is only 40 years since the 1946 Act replaced the Coal Commission with the National Coal Board.

People are bound to admit that nationalisation has proved to be a failure, even on the basis of the arguments put forward for it at the time. For example, it has manifestly failed to guarantee employment in the industry, as only 15 per cent. of the manpower needed at the time of nationalisation remains. It has also manifestly failed to provide the cheap coal on which industry depends, and imports are kept out only by hole-in-the-corner and backdoor agreements that are forced on the Central Electricity Generating Board. Moreover, nationalisation has failed to protect our market share in the energy industry. By contrast, the consumption of coal as a proportion of the total amount of energy consumed has increased in other parts of the world during the last 10 years.

Nationalisation has also failed to produce a social return. Billions of pounds have been wasted. Before the strike the figure was £1 billion per annum, and in the 10 years from 1974 to 1984 the figure was £6·5 billion per year. In addition, the taxpayer provides £700 million each year for investment. The NCB has been a great ball and chain round the ankles of British industry because it has kept our power prices at least 10 per cent. higher than they would otherwise have been if the CEGB had been able to buy its coal on a free market.

Even more obviously, nationalisation has failed to bring about good labour relations. When nationalisation took place, the great hope was that the old battles between the owners and the workers would disappear, but that has not happened. In 1972 and in 1973-74 there were great strikes. Most damagingly of all, there was the Scargill strike of 1984-85. Thus, in the past 10 years in particular, the coal industry's record has been worse than that of the Arabs when it comes to interrupting energy supplies.

Conservative Members see, and want to see, a great future for our coal industry. I am astonished that Opposition Members do not want to give more support to our proposals, which attempt to secure that advance. The

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

new clause invites my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is the Government's great privatiser, to give the coal industry the benefits that this Government have given in other areas since 1979 through their privatisation programme.

As I always do in such debates, I shall declare an interest, in that I have a connection with the National Association of Licensed Opencast Operators. However, what I have to say is no different from what I have said in virtually every coal debate since becoming a Member of Parliament and prior to acquiring that interest. Privatisation is successful in other areas, and there is no reason why that success should not be repeated in the coal industry. Unlike the NUM, which pursues solely political goals, Conservative Members seek to pursue social and economic goals that will benefit those who work in the industry as well as the whole nation — taxpayers and consumers alike — through the increased efficiency that privatisation will bring.

I wholeheartedly support what my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) said about the necessity for liberalisation in advance of privatisation. That could be done very simply. I shall not rehearse those arguments, however, as I put them on Second Reading. Nevertheless, I hope that on this occasion my hon. Friend the Minister will reply to some of the points that I made. The 1983 report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission made recommendations to liberalise the small private sector regime. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give us some convincing reasons today to show why the Government have not yet found legislative time to make the small changes necessary.

5.15 pm

It is vital that Britain should have an efficient coal industry that is capable of providing for our expanding energy needs in an acceptable way. A monopoly is a disadvantage, because in the present structure there is a means of manipulating the price to the consumer. Happily, we now see less of that because, under the direction of my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Government have made immense advances in securing a stable and expanding future for the coal industry, but the pressure would always be on the Government — particularly if we should ever have the misfortune to have a Labour Government — to protect a nationalised industry against the forces of competition and efficiency.

The economy of scale arguments that are normally advanced for such nationalised arrangements cannot really, in all logic, be applied to this industry. It is unlikely that we need a single monolithic entity to secure economies of scale in coal. Moreover, there are more likely to be difficulties with an industry that is organised on its present basis. I say that because of the complexity of organisation, administration and so on, and all the competing claims that are made, for example, on managers' time in having to lobby Ministers and provide the detailed reports required by the Department of Energy.

The coal monopoly is not by any means a natural monopoly. Indeed, it is a political monopoly that has been imposed by statute. As the hon. Member for Stockton, South said, there is no reason why we could not have competition within the industry in a variety of different forms, whether by co-operative or joint ventures, individual mines or groups of mines, or whether it be that the industry is broken up by area on a profit-making basis. A huge variety of opportunity is open to us.

Thus, we could end the conspiracy against consumers and taxpayers that has gone on for the past 40 years. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assist the coal industry in achieving its statutory obligation to secure the efficient development of a coal mining industry in this country. Before 1979 that was not achieved, and it is only in the past two or three years that we have made significant strides towards that.

I believe that denationalisation and privatisation will bring immense benefits to the industry and to us all, as taxpayers and consumers. Moreover, I can see enormous opportunities for efficiency gains and expansion. Opposition Members often say that they want new coalfields to be developed, but they deny us the means of doing that. The Coal Industry Act 1980 imposed an injunction on the NCB to break even by 1983-84. There is now an injunction for the industry to break even by the end of this decade. I hope that the date will not be postponed yet again.

The necessity for Government to act is brought about only by the artificial statutory regime in which the industry has to operate. If it was in private hands, it would be profitable and would operate in the interests of the whole country. The cost of electricity to consumers would be greatly reduced, as Lord Marshall said during the strike, possibly by 10 or 15 per cent., if we had the freedom to purchase coal in the cheapest market.

There is no reason why Britain should not have the cheapest market. Efficiency is not the enemy of the miner, as can be seen from the increase in earnings of those still in the industry. The tragic number of job losses in recent years would not have occurred if the industry had become more efficient earlier on. There would be a bigger market for coal in Britain if it were not for the likes of Mr. Scargill, who has frightened industrialists off coal, because they feared that their supplies could be interrupted at crucial moments. They were frightened off because they did not want to build up stocks as an insurance against the possibility of a strike and incur the cost of keeping coal idle as a result. The cost fell on the whole nation, because mothballed oil-fired stations had to be kept in operation against the possibility of a strike. The huge cost of the oil burn during the coal strike would not have been necessary were it not for the backward-looking, dinosaur attitudes of Opposition Members and their supporters.

According to Opposition Members, the coal strike of 1984-85 started because of the failure of the Coal Board to observe the guidelines for pit closures. If there were the opportunity for private market investors to put their money into pits, there would be no need for colliery review procedures. The market would be the review procedure. If a pit was inherently profitable, people would put money into it and keep it in operation. That would involve a more hard-headed decision than the bureaucratic self-serving one that the industry takes at the moment.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): The hon. Gentleman has said it all.

Mr. Hamilton: That is certainly true. All of us have said it all. The right hon. Gentleman has said it all before as well. I shall continue to say it all until the right hon.

Gentleman agrees. I suggest that he addresses his remarks to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. The sooner the right hon. Gentleman agrees with me, the sooner I shall keep quiet.

There are many benefits of privatisation. Technical progress would become more rapid and relevant to different scales of operation, as we have seen in the North sea, where advances in the development of big oilfields have accompanied the ability to exploit smaller, previously inaccessible deposits. We would thereby achieve a greater security of supply with competitive suppliers. Above all, we would depoliticise the economic decisions that we have been obliged to take. There would be pressure to reduce costs, keep down prices and raise efficiency.

The Government's role would then be the proper role of the Government, not that of a Department interfering in the day-to-day management of the industry. The Government's role would be to maintain competition and to internalise the external costs of mining which otherwise would fall upon the community, and that would be wholly admirable. I counsel my hon. Friend to take to heart the words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who was the architect of the privatisation programme during the last two Parliaments. In a recent publication he is reported as saying:

"It is already clear to me who mainly prospers through privatisation. The shareholders of the companies we have sold prosper, the employees prosper, and most of all the customers and the whole Nation prosper. That is why privatisation in the United Kingdom has been such a success and why the programme will continue until all state-owned commercial industries are returned to where they belong — to the private sector."

I emphasise the last few words,

"all state-owned commercial industries."

I hope that this legislation clearly presages the return of the coal industry to the private sector, so that it and we can prosper together.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) for raising this issue, which is important to his party. His colleagues are known for their enthusiasm in this matter. They will not be surprised at my response.

I must, however, dissociate myself from the comments of my hon. Friend about an alleged conspiracy between my Department and Hobart House to defraud the electorate. Perhaps he went a little over the top.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South raised some important points concerning the power to fix royalties. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost), who has always robustly argued his case, made some important points about the private sector in the coal industry, both the licensed opencast sector, to which much reference is made, and the private deep mine sector, to which perhaps insufficient reference is made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) clearly laid out the social and economic goals which he considers will benefit all those in the industry, as well as the taxpayer and the country. I am advised—I do not rest on this argument — that the new clause would not have the effect that some hon. Members seek because, under schedule 1 to the 1946 legislation, the residue of coal will remain with British Coal.

My substantive response is that there is scope for the private and public sectors effectively to work together. The opencast sector is a prime example of how best that can be done. In 1983 the Monopolies and Mergers Commission reported private sector output of 700,000 tonnes a year. By 1985-86 output had risen to 1·4 million tonnes, which is about 10 per cent. of the UK's annual opencast output.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash rightly mentioned the subject of royalties, which is a matter for negotiation between private sector operators and what will be British Coal. He mentioned the figure of £16 a tonne. He will know that many companies do not pay that level of royalty.

My hon. Friend will be aware also, I hope, that in 1981 my predecessor, the Under-Secretary of State, as a result of meetings with the National Coal Board and the National Association of Licensed Opencast Operators, laid down five clear guidelines. The so-called five principles of 1981, which were agreed between the National Coal Board and private operators, and endorsed by the Government, have allowed arrangements to work well. The fourth guideline states that the NCB agreed

"to set royalties at levels which will permit efficiently-managed operators to develop their business profitably."

That is an important guideline for the private sector.

The other guidelines, under which the NCB agreed to license opencast sites with up to 35,000 tonnes of workable reserves to resume the practice of considering a second licence for adjacent sites, bringing the total tonnage of contiguous reserves under licence to around 50,000 tonnes, to exercise the greatest possible flexibility on the maximum size of licensed deep mines, to phase out the practice of requiring many opencast licensees to deliver their coal to the board by offering all new licences free from any delivery requirements, and to reduce royalties for new licences in any case in which accounting evidence was provided which demonstrated that profit expectations would otherwise be cut to unreasonably low levels, are important and have worked well.

This is not an area in which the Government have closed their minds. It is important to ensure that the relationship between the private and public sectors and between private opencast mines and private deep mines is encouraged. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash, despite his usual efficiency, has visited all the 160 privately operated deep mines or the 75 private licensed opencast sites. This private sector already has an important share in the coal industry. I repeat that the private sector is an important part of our great coal industry.

The Bill is the wrong vehicle for a lengthy and major debate on the issues that have been raised, although I recognise their importance. My hon. Friends will know that on many occasions I have said that there are no plans for privatisation. Equally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have said that we shall support any move to give the work force—men and management in the industry—a more direct stake in their industry. With this Bill we recognise that, over the past two years, there has been a massive process of restructuring. It has resulted in a stable, viable industry that is capable of offering secure, long-term employment and of contributing positive benefits to the nation.

There will always be restructuring in an extractive industry such as coal mining. The important news for the industry in this legislation is that the major restructuring

[Mr. David Hunt]

of recent years is drawing to a close with the end of the redundant mineworkers' pension scheme at the end of March this year.

The legislation is designed to assist those final steps by which management can achieve its goal and, for the first time, run a great industry independent of handouts from the taxpayer. Our coal industry is the only one in Europe that has that possibility within its grasp, and it is the only coal industry in Europe that is improving productivity. Surely that is justification, if any were needed, of the path that management, with Government support, has taken and the response that it has had from the men.

In those circumstances, I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) to withdraw the new clause.

5.30 pm

Mr. Fallon: With the leave of the House——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman does not need the leave of the House.

Mr. Fallon: We have had a useful debate, perhaps more useful than I could have anticipated. If I understood the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) correctly, alliance Members suggest that they no longer support the monopoly in principle and that they favour transferring the licensing power from the board to the Secretary of State. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman because he is well ahead of his alliance colleagues in recognising the importance of markets and competition. His understanding that state regulation and state licensing do not necessarily also mean state provision should be better known on Teesside and also in Stockton, South.

I welcome also the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Erewash (Mr. Rost) and for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who have supported my case — one with great eloquence and the other at great length—and who made the case against monopoly. Nobody could seriously defend the monopoly that was enshrined in the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946.

The reply of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State did not surprise me as much as it disappointed me. I hope that one thing will result from the debate — perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can help me in this — and that is that news of the debate can be leaked back to his Department. Perhaps it could be conveyed, not only to his Department, but by some agency to Hobart House so that those who preserve the monopoly and operate its restrictions can be made a little more aware of the spread of competition and the removal of monopoly that has taken place, not only in other industries, but in other Departments in Whitehall.

I make it clear that in the new clause we were not proposing the privatisation of the coal industry. We were not even suggesting——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not seek to elaborate on the speech that he made when he proposed the new clause to the House.

Mr. Fallon: We were not proposing privatisation or the transfer of ownership of existing assets. However, we suggested that the industry should be opened up to change, private investment, joint ventures and to the competition that could be provided by an expanding independent sector.

It is clear from the debate that that discussion has only just begun and that it will continue. For that reason, I do not wish to press the new clause to a Division, despite much encouragement to do so, because it is clear that, if leave to withdraw the new clause is refused and it is negatived, Opposition Members will be shown to be the defenders of monopoly, privilege and restrictive practice. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the new clause.

Motion and clause by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

COAL INDUSTRY TRUSTS

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 5, line 20, at end insert—

'(5A) Where any functions relating to a trust are exercisable by more than one body of trustees, for the purposes of subsection (1)*(b)* above the Charity Commissioners may disregard or have regard only to the members of one of those bodies.'.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

Clause 6

OTHER SOCIAL WELFARE BODIES

Amendment made: No. 5, in page 6, line 45, at end insert—

'(6A) The fact that a provision relating to the constitution of a body has been added or amended by an order under this section shall not preclude its subsequent alteration or deletion in accordance with any relevant powers.'. — *[Mr. David Hunt.]*

5.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I have watched the progress of the Bill with interest, because when it was announced in the Gracious Speech that the Bill would proceed there appeared to be considerable hostility to it and cries of how passionately the measure would be opposed. On Second Reading we saw the decision to introduce a major amendment. As has been pointed out, it was a strange amendment, because it totally ignored most of the main clauses. Then we were told that great changes would take place in Committee. Therefore, fearing a long Committee stage with strenuous debates, I asked my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State if he would conduct the proceedings with his usual skill and patience. He did so, but we discovered that we had to deal with only seven minor amendments and one new clause.

Looking at the Bill in its completed stages, intact from any hostility that Opposition Members have expressed, it is interesting to recognise the positive and good things that the Bill carries into operation.

Clause 1, which was strangely opposed by the Opposition, changes the name of the organisation to British Coal. That request was made by the industry because it considered that the marketing of its product would be substantially improved by having such a title, which would appeal to people because they would know that they would be buying a product that was made in this country. That would be clearly understood and would be far better for advertising purposes than the more complicated title of the National Coal Board.

However, that request by the marketing side of the industry was, strangely, totally opposed by Opposition Members who considered that it was an extraordinary plot

to privatise the industry. If in the near future we were to privatise the industry, we could easily and speedily give the organisation any name that we wish. However, the title of British Coal is welcomed by the marketing side of the coal industry.

Of course, we hope that the marketing side will be extremely successful in the years to come. It is involved in a wide range of new products and technologies, especially in the domestic market. I wish that marketing drive every success. Those concerned will appreciate that my hon. Friends are sympathetic to their application that the title of British Coal should be granted, and will be appalled by the manner in which the clause has been attacked by Opposition Members.

Clauses 2, 3 and 4 of the Bill set out a series of financial arrangements. Once again, nobody can but claim that the financial arrangements put into place by the Bill are exceedingly beneficial to the industry as a whole, and that they express very firmly the Government's confidence in the important place that the industry will have in the future.

No other coal industry in Western Europe can look forward in the next three years to £2 billion of capital investment. While the coal industries in the rest of Western Europe have declined, especially in countries that have recently been under Socialist control, in this country the industry will enjoy £2 billion of further capital investment to improve its productivity and the way in which it can produce coal at a price that can compete with other energies and fuels in the market.

The financial background is generous in carrying on the provisions for those who have become voluntarily redundant during a period of major rationalisation of the industry. Anybody with an interest in the industry must consider the degree of rationalisation that has taken place. After the considerable change in manpower that has occurred, present levels of coal production are close to what they were before rationalisation, but are achieved at far lower cost and with far higher productivity.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that the Secretary of State will not forget that that rationalisation, which includes the closure of Whittle colliery in my constituency — which was accepted on geological grounds by the National Union of Mineworkers — involves major social problems for the areas concerned, and that he cannot leave solely to other Ministers, who decide matters such as development area status, the responsibility for the consequences in those areas.

Mr. Walker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know that some of the financial provisions that we are making in the Bill have enabled financial support to be given to the enterprise company that has done such remarkable work in bringing jobs to coal mining areas where pits have had to close. It is a new concept. A total of 168,000 men were made redundant during periods of Labour Government and there was no such enterprise company in operation. On present trends, that enterprise company, with substantial financing, will produce, I hope, about 25,000 new jobs in mining areas. Those jobs will be far better than working in a declining mine and they may well produce expansion in the future.

The clauses of the Bill that were significant and important in every sense were clauses 5, 6 and 7. They gave the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, among others, its proper right to representation on the various social funds and pension funds to which it has every entitlement. Conservative Members expressed their surprise at the negative approach taken by the Labour party when we discussed that on Second Reading. I referred to it as the "Scargill silence". I must say that the silence continued in Committee. In debate after debate on clauses 5, 6 and 7 the Opposition Members sat silent. When they were given an opportunity to vote and express their view, they decided on a policy of abstention on this vital issue. Therefore, there are tens of thousands of mineworkers who know that the Labour party had no wish for the men to have proper representation on the administration of the pension funds concerned.

The Labour party wishes to continue the ban on the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. That ban was first imposed by the Labour party, which refused to have any political affiliation with the union, and it was also imposed by the Trades Union Congress, which refused to allow it to be part of the TUC. Through the Bill's various stages, we have seen the Labour party's determination not to recognise a perfectly democratic union. In fact, it was the UDM that maintained the old tradition of the National Union of Mineworkers to have a democratic vote before taking industrial action.

I know that later today the finances of the NUM will be disclosed. That will reveal the considerable financial problems it faces. It will reveal that its own statements, made at its own meetings, show the great difficulty being experienced in meeting its obligations. There will be a suggestion that the union will need substantially increased contributions if it is to maintain solvency. The NUM's leadership did much damage to the mining industry by not giving proper democratic rights to the UDM. It was the NUM's actions that resulted in the creation of the UDM. I hope that miners throughout the country will recognise that the "Scargill silence" of the Labour party is bad not only for that party but for the NUM.

The Bill provides appropriate financial arrangements. It helps the Coal Board to provide better marketing activities and gives a democratic right to a democratic union. I believe that the coal industry and the country will judge it to be a fine piece of legislation and will be shocked at the Labour party's attitude to it.

5.44 pm

Mr. Orme: Since April 1985 there have been more than 55,000 redundancies in the coal industry, 59 pits have closed or merged, and colliery capacity has fallen to 90 million tonnes of deep-mined coal. Unmployment in coalfield communities has gone sky-high, and 14 of the 22 travel-to-work areas that saw the highest rise in unemployment between January 1985 and April 1986 were coal communities. The Bill is the Government's response to that devastation. It is a pathetic and unsatisfactory response. It will do nothing for the industry. It will not improve morale or restore good industrial relations.

On Second Reading and in Committee, we argued that this is a pit closure Bill. We maintain that that is the case. The Bill sets the pre-conditions for a further round of pit closures and redundancies. The financial provisions are totally inadequate to provide a secure and expanding future for the industry. Indeed, they are mainly to cover redundancy, redeployment and pit closures.

The Government have no vision of an expanding British economy. Therefore, they have no vision of

[Mr. Orme]

increased electricity demand. They are sanguine about the run-down of a basic British industry that provides the fuel for manufacturing, hospitals, schools, heating homes and electricity generation. The Government's complacency, so vividly shown in yesterday's debate, is once again reflected in the financial provisions of this Bill. We have received no satisfactory answer to our anxiety that the provisions will not even cover those categories for which it is designed. We remain unconvinced that the Bill does not pave the way for the privatisation of the industry. We have just had an interesting debate on that point. Privatisation is certainly popular among Government Back Benchers, as we have witnessed, and Ministers' denials have become increasingly vague, not least the reply that we have just heard from the Under-Secretary of State. Already, ancillaries such as Associated Heat Services have been sold off in what can be only a trimming exercise. The accelerated sale of NCB houses at auctions at the Kensington Hilton has not provided the NCB with a vast amount of revenue and it has caused great distress and confusion in many coalfield communities. I understand that even today many of my hon. Friends have been to see the NCB about those outrageous sales.

The Bill will do nothing to restore morale in the industry. As the Secretary of State pointed out, in Committee we did not argue or vote against clauses 5, 6 and 7. However, we did argue that they would not solve the very real industrial relations problems throughout British coalfields. To rectify that, we introduced a new clause to cover every pit in the coalfields. The Secretary of State did not even mention that clause in his speech. We believe that trade unions have a right to recognition and that they must have the right to represent and negotiate on behalf of their members. That is currently being denied to minorities in British coalfields.

In Committee, the Minister seemed to be under the impression that members of minority unions were not discriminated against and, in some cases, victimised when carrying out legitimate union activity. In Committee, I gave some specific examples of that. I should like to put on record a letter that has been sent to me by Mr. Richardson of the Nottinghamshire area NUM. It is a copy of a letter that was sent by Mr. A. A. Searle of the NCB, who is the manager of the Bolsover pit. The letter states:

"Dear Mr. Wright, I refer to your interview in my office on Wednesday 17th December 1986 and write to confirm the remarks I made at that time. You were observed in the Colliery Canteen on the evening of Tuesday, 16th December, 1986 between 9.30 pm and 10 pm talking to the night shift. I warned you that you must not repeat this exercise at any time in the future and any recurrence will lead to your instant and summary dismissal. You must not, either during or outside of your shift, conduct NUM business on British Coal premises whilst the union is not recognised at the Bolsover colliery."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is worth recording that at the Bolsover colliery the NUM has the majority membership. The incident mentioned in the letter followed the one in which Geoffrey Poulter, the branch secretary of the NUM at Bolsover, was sacked only a week or 10 days before the letter went to the branch delegate, Stephen Wright, who is one of my constituents. This smacks of a big brother attitude by the management at Bolsover, and it is being supported by those Ministers who are happy to talk about minorities, freedom and justice, provided it is for one particular section. They are quite happy to see the thought police of the Coal Board operating against the NUM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Member should be brief.

Mr. Orme: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) makes the case for our new clause. We put it to the Under-Secretary in Committee that that sort of victimisation and discrimination was taking place, and he denied it. Here is an instance of trade union members being denied basic human rights within the mining industry at present.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I appreciate that some words and phrases are unparliamentary. However, will the right hon. Gentleman dispel the impression that we had upstairs and say something downstairs, if he is allowed to use the phrase, about the Union of Democratic Mineworkers?

Mr. Orme: We said that we were moving the new clause, and that if the Government accepted it we would accept without qualification clauses 5, 6 and 7. This clause —this is the important point—will give minority rights not only to the NUM in Nottingham or elsewhere, but also to UDM members in other parts of the British coalfields. Examples such as the one I have just given led us to introduce our new clause in Committee—a new clause that would ensure fair play for all unions. The Government's response proved that that is the last thing that they are interested in.

We are opposed to the terms that the Government have put forward. They would not accept a democratically drawn up new clause. It is upon that basis that we are right in our opposition and right in the case that we have put for the British coal industry. I therefore urge my hon. Friends to vote against the Bill tonight.

5.52 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I support the Third Reading of the Bill. This 18th Coal Industry Bill will have greater significance in terms of future security and prosperity for the industry and its employees than all its predecessors. I include the original nationalisation Bill of 1946. That Bill heralded so much promise for the country and its miners. In hindsight, we know that it failed on both counts. The coal barons were replaced by a highly motivated political trade union, more interested in political domination than in its duty to ensure its members' continuing prosperity.

This Bill, by comparison, brings the coal industry ultimately into the 20th century and sets the course to make it one of Britain's most successful industries in the 21st century. British coal is a sunrise industry with reserves that will last almost 300 years. The usage of coal will gradually change from mainly power station burning and domestic use to replacing our oil and gas requirements, whose known reserves will last no more than 25 years. To replace today's oil and gas requirements from coal, we will need to mine 180 million tonnes. Our European partners have few workable coal reserves left, so there is also an export potential. Derivatives from coal will be used for the raw stock of many of our chemical manufacturers. At the moment, 25 derivatives are used, and in time this number must rise.

During the passage of this Bill, like its predecessors, we heard more of the history of the coal industry than its future from the Opposition. Let the past be a guide to the future, but do not let the Opposition's political dogma cloud the prospects of the exciting future of this great industry.

What some people describe as "blighted reserves" will in time be gasified underground for direct use, leaving the more accessible seams to be brought to the surface. This Bill will guarantee not only the miners' prosperity, but also their security of employment for years to come. Accepting the scientific evidence available, no miner need fear the competition from nuclear energy. There will be no conflict, because coal will be required for other purposes, and in the not too distant future will be too valuable to contemplate burning. That is why I am confident of the long-term prospects for the coal industry. That, coupled with the other clauses in this Bill, will give the Union of Democratic Mineworkers its rightful place in representing its members' interests socially and industrially.

In my maiden speech I said that I was proud to be the Member of Parliament for Sherwood, Britain's largest mining constituency. That is nothing compared with how I feel towards my mining constituents and their families today. Their fight for survival during the year-long dispute, and the birth of trade union democracy, was won through their determination and guts for survival, despite the collusion between the Labour party and the NUM for their destruction. The UDM is here to stay. Its leaders' professionalism and adherence to democratic principles will ensure that, and in time it will be the only union representing mineworkers, because the ramshackle organisation in Sheffield called the NUM is bereft of principles and money.

I can speak only for my own constituents. I do not speak for the miners of Ashfield, because the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) is in the Chamber. Nevertheless, I hope that I speak on this occasion for all the other Nottinghamshire miners in thanking my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), for bringing this Bill forward, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of the UDM, and securing the future of British Coal. So far the Labour party has not recognised the UDM. Do you intend to do so today? I shall give way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not bring me into these matters. He is bringing the UDM into these matters a little too much. On Third Reading we must confine ourselves to what is in the Bill. I do not find any reference to that organisation in the Bill.

Mr. Stewart: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Does the Labour party intend to recognise the UDM?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will neither give way nor find it necessary to invite anyone to give way because the Bill is not about the matters to which he is addressing himself.

Mr. Stewart: Will the Opposition recognise both trade unions working in the mining industry?

I remind the House and the country that there is no substitute for coal, but coal can be substituted for any other fossil fuel and its derivitives. That is the long-term guarantee of security for Britain's greatest industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We have about 50 minutes left and about 15 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. The difficulties will be obvious.

5.59 pm

Mr. Wrigglesworth: May I begin by picking up two points made by the Secretary of State? First, he referred to the opposition to the Bill from the Opposition Benches. For the record, I think that he will concede that that is not entirely accurate. The Opposition on the Benches occupied by my right hon. and hon. Friends have given the Bill fullhearted support from Second Reading through Committee and will do so again on Third Reading.

Secondly, the Secretary of State referred to NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. I do not want to pursue the point at any length, but he will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), myself and others pressed him to establish that body for a long time before he eventually got round to doing so. We are delighted that it is succeeding in the way that it is, and we are delighted that he has increased its funding so that it can carry out the excellent work that it is doing in the areas where collieries have been closed. I only wish that even more could be done.

We support the Bill because it continues to give the financial support which the industry rightly deserves and needs.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I must not give way to the hon. Gentleman, otherwise I shall prevent others from speaking.

The Bill gives much needed financial support to the industry and therefore deserves the support of the House. It also deserves support for the rights which it gives to the UDM to be represented in the trusts and welfare bodies from which it has been excluded by the NUM. Despite the efforts that have been made and the negotiations that have taken place, the union has not been able to obtain the places which any reasonable person would accept were its right. Substantial bodies of workers are represented by the new union and they have every right to be represented on the bodies that are there to serve the people in the mining industry.

Mr. Thompson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I shall give way, but it will prevent other hon. Members from speaking.

Mr. Thompson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. When the hon. Gentleman says "we", is he describing the Social Democratic party or the alliance?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I am speaking for the alliance in this debate as, indeed, in other debates.

If the Labour party has the true interests of the mining industry at heart, it will reject the dog-in-the-manger attitude which the NUM's leadership has adopted since the strike ended. The sooner the divisions that exist within the mining industry are overcome, the better for everyone. They will not be overcome — they would take a long time to be overcome in any case — unless there is an attempt by those within bodies, not only in the mining industry but outside, to help to bring about reconciliation.

If the Labour party continues to give Canute-like support to Mr. Scargill and the NUM's leadership, there

[Mr. Wrigglesworth]

will never be any move in the direction of reconciliation between the warring factions in the mining industry. It is in no one's interests that that battle should continue for ever and a day. It will be impossible to overcome the fierce antagonisms and feelings that arose from the violence and intimidation that occurred during the dispute. I have condemned many times the lack of criticism during the dispute from the Labour Benches of the violence and intimidation that took place at that time.

But life goes on, and if we are to have a successful industry and prosperity in the mining areas, it is in everyone's interests, and in the national interest, that attempts should be made to achieve reconciliation. That will not be achieved by excluding the UDM and hoping that it will go away. It will not. It will continue to represent, courageously and well, its members, not only in the Nottinghamshire area, but in many other areas. Undoubtedly, if it continues with the guts and determination that it has shown since it started, it will go from strength to strength. The sooner that the Labour party acknowledges that fact, the sooner there will be a hope of some reconciliation and change in the future.

I hope that the more sensible Members of the House will acknowledge that view. My hope may be in vain. Indeed, if the Bill's proceedings have been anything to go by, I certainly do hope in vain. The Labour party sat on its hands and said nothing on the relevant clauses in Committee. As has been said, it is disgraceful that Labour Members made no comment whatever.

Finally, I want to pay, as will all hon. Members, a great tribute to the management and workers, both in the NUM and the UDM, in the mining industry for the way in which they have worked and succeeded since the strike ended. I hope that the Bill will enable them to build on the success that they have achieved—productivity levels that have never been achieved in the coal mining industry before. I hope that the Bill will help to bring about even further success in the industry and that is why we shall give it our full support tonight.

6.5 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): I start by expressing my thanks to the Government for fulfilling their pledges in introducing the Bill. Those thanks come not just from me, but from the miners of Nottinghamshire, whose pensions, welfare and social rights are so much affected by the Bill, and also from the residents of Nottingham who experienced many difficult months during the miners' strike.

The need for the Bill came about when the UDM split from the NUM in 1985 because it could not accept the new rule book which it had supported for 40 years before the split. It was simply because the NUM became undemocratic. The NUM had ignored the role of the ballot box during the miners' strike and had changed the majority which was needed for a strike from 55 per cent. to 50 per cent.

The changes in the rule book also removed autonomy from certain areas. A disciplinary rule was brought in and in Durham 400 men were expelled, many of whom were members of the UDM. All those changes were introduced in one block vote at the NUM conference in 1985. As a result of that, from which came the need to introduce the Bill, the UDM decided to split from the NUM in the summer of 1985——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been tolerant and flexible about the debate so far, but the hon. Gentleman is really going too far. None of those matters is germane on Third Reading.

Mr. Ottaway: I am only trying to demonstrate why we have the Bill and why I am grateful to the Government for introducing it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That might have been appropriate on Second Reading, but not on Third Reading. We have the Bill and it has been debated by the House.

Mr. Ottaway: The truth of the matter is that the TUC is not prepared to recognise all the miners' unions in Britain——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been tolerant and we have had a wide debate, but, as far as I can see, there is no reference in the Bill to the TUC. It really is going too far to start bringing it in. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will deal more closely with what is in the Bill.

Mr. Ottaway: I am merely trying to refer to the situation that resulted in the need for the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am trying to tell the hon. Gentleman that he is departing from what is permissible on Third Reading. If he persists in doing so, I shall have no option but to instruct him to resume his seat.

Mr. Ottaway: I shall abide by your wishes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Opposition opposed the Bill on Second Reading and that is an affront to democracy and the mining unions in the Nottinghamshire area. The Opposition have sought to deny the UDM's participation in the pension, social and welfare funds of the coal industry.

The only contribution made by the Opposition in this debate about the other union in the industry was an amendment in Committee which the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) spoke about on Third Reading. He said that he was prepared to barter across the Dispatch Box certain rights affecting representation and contributions in the various British Coal committees. For him to say that is a disgrace, and the people of Nottinghamshire will find it a disgrace. The only objective of the new clause was to give rights to the NUM in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Apart from 30 seconds from the right hon. Member for Salford, East on Second Reading, we have had complete silence from the Opposition. That silence has spread from the House. Just the other day I received a challenge from my opposition, the Labour party candidate in the forthcoming general election. He challenged me to a debate on any issue that I cared to name. I said to him, "There is a brave lad." I challenged him to a debate on the future of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. I found that the disease of lockjaw which has hit the Opposition in this debate had spread to Nottinghamshire, because since I accepted his challenge I have not heard a word from him. This demonstrates the Labour party's hostility to the people of Nottinghamshire and the UDM.

This is almost certainly a general election year, and I do not deny that I will have a difficult time in that election

because mine is a marginal seat. Whatever the outcome of that election, as I campaign in the streets in Nottinghamshire and in Bulwell in the weeks leading up to the election at least I will be able to hold my head high and say that, unlike the Labour party, I was prepared to stand up for the people of Nottinghamshire. This is a sorry episode for the Labour party and I can assure Opposition Members that their actions will not be forgotten in Nottinghamshire.

6.11 pm

Mr. Skinner: I am pleased that my hon. Friends raised the matter of minorities as it affects the NUM in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. I should like to put on record the fact that the NUM has been making a great impact on that coalfield and the minority is getting larger all the time. To that extent I have no doubt that they will find some favour with the Minister.

I am worried that this Bill could be regarded as a prelude to privatisation and has nothing to do with the cries that we have heard in this debate. We heard cries from Conservative Members, some of whom have now left the Chamber, when debating new clause 1 and the Minister found himself in something of a quandary in responding to the catcalls. If the Government are re-elected, the National Coal Board, or British Coal, as it is soon to be called, would be a prime object for privatisation.

The Tory Government are hell bent on destroying British Coal and on attempting to destroy the NUM in the process. The Government have been engaged in that exercise for the past two or three years and are now getting the industry ready for the spivs and racketeers. — *[Interruption]* — most of whom are represented on the Government Benches. The matter of privatisation has already been touched upon in the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Privatisation was debated in the course of our earlier proceedings when there was an amendment before the House. At that time it might have been appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to make the speech that he is seeking to make now. However, we are now on Third Reading.

Mr. Skinner: We are on Third Reading of a Bill containing sums of money to enable British Coal to operate. Many of us think that that sum is insufficient to meet the needs of the industry on a long-term basis. If that is our argument, it follows that that shortage of money can lead to a change in ownership of British Coal. That could mean privatisation and we say strongly that we are against that. The road that I have just trod was long and tortuous, but it has brought me to anti-privatisation. If the smart Alecs on the Government Benches had been sharp enough to understand that, they too might have been able to prepare better speeches than the ones from which they read.

Mr. Andy Stewart: What is the hon. Gentleman doing?

Mr. Skinner: I am not reading. I have had to sort out my speech on my feet and that is not always easy.

We are worried about the future of the industry and this Bill does nothing for its long-term future. It is all about doing something for today, for the moment, to try to get this Tory Government over another hump for another 12 months. We have argued throughout the passage of the Bill and before that our aim for the industry from which we come is to see our 300-year supply of coal developed in a way that maximises its potential energy.

Mr. Ottaway: On a point of order. Is there any difference between what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is saying and what I was saying? You told me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must not challenge my ruling in that way. I am listening carefully to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I am glad that his latter remarks were a little nearer to the substance of what is proper in this debate than were his earlier remarks.

Mr. Skinner: If we argue that in the Bill insufficient money is being allocated to the mining industry, then we can argue that from a long-term point of view the money is insufficient to meet its needs. We argue that there should be no redundancies and that mines should be kept open. Some of us would argue that some of the mines that were closed ought to be reopened. A future Labour Government will exploit those 300 years of reserves and produce the money that is lacking in this Bill in order to ensure that more people are employed.

With a view to dealing with the after effects of this Bill and other Bills, this morning some of us went to see British Coal about the scandalous way in which it is selling off houses in which many miners with more than 40 years experience of working underground live. *[Interruption.]* Housing is mentioned in the Bill. At that meeting the British Coal representatives were as hard and stony faced as Conservative Members. They do not care about the housing of those miners and are not worried about the pensioners. Their only concern is to sell off the houses to the spivs and the Rachmanites and the racketeers who sit like leeches on the periphery of the coalfields waiting to make a big fat killing. Many such people are represented by Government hon. Members. We want to put that right and when we get back to government we will change that part of the Bill because it is obnoxious to those who have served the industry so well.

The Bill provides insufficient money to meet the needs of widows and others who still do not receive concessionary coal, even though some pits were closed before 1968. I notice that the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) is missing. I have raised this matter time and time again. The Bill does not provide compensation for those people, and the Opposition want to have the opportunity to put that right.

6.20 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): During the passage of the Bill many of my colleagues and I have been puzzled about the Labour party's ambivalent attitude towards those provisions that would lead to fairness in representation on the superannuation schemes and in the industry's institutions. I refer in particular to the provisions of clause 7.

I suspected during the passage of the Bill, particularly in Committee, that we were hearing not about the real reasons for opposition but about a cover-up being perpetrated by the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers. My fears have been fully vindicated. A document has come into my possession that arouses real concern for all those pensioners in the industry who have

[Mr. Spencer Batiste]

been represented thus far by the NUM in the industry's superannuation schemes. Is my hon. Friend the Minister satisfied that clause 7 will protect adequately the rights of individuals and that it will ensure that unsuitable people are not appointed as representatives on the boards of superannuation schemes?

I refer to the financial report that was presented to the finance and general purposes sub-committee of the NUM on 13 November 1986. Its implications are stunning. As time is short, I shall refer only to short extracts, but I shall make a full copy of the document available as soon as the debate is over. It reveals that the NUM has a deficit of nearly £1·85 million and that it has no resources with which to meet it. The report is relevant to clause 7, because it reveals that the NUM is about to default on its superannuation schemes. These passages must be brought to the attention of the House so that my hon. Friends——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is difficult to see how the internal finances of the NUM are relevant to the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Batiste: This is a matter of the gravest importance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. From the brief extracts that I wish to read to the House, it is quite clear that the NUM is about to default on its superannuation payments and that it has no money with which to make them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must tell me why that is relevant to the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Batiste: I shall, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Clause 7(4) of the Bill says:

"References in this section to participation by an organisation include participation by any person as a nominee or on behalf of the organisation."

There may be grave cause for investigation of the way in which certain persons have exercised their judgment in relation to the NUM's superannuation scheme. I am not sure that there are sufficient powers in the Bill to prevent such unsuitable persons from being nominated by the trade union as representatives on the boards of the industry's superannuation schemes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These are factors that the Secretary of State will undoubtedly take into account when exercising the discretion that the Bill confers upon him, but I am not sure that it is appropriate for the House to go into the internal affairs of another organisation.

Mr. Batiste: I raise the matter now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am not at all clear, having read the clause, whether the Secretary of State has such a discretion. I seek that assurance by raising these very important matters, albeit very briefly. One brief passage will give you clear evidence of my concern and why I think that the matter is relevant. It says:

"The National Union has an obligation to pay approximately £450,000 per year to the Officials and Staff Superannuation Scheme."

Unless action is taken, the superannuation scheme could be in very serious difficulties. The report states specifically that the union's ability to operate is threatened and that it is not in a position to meet its continuing obligations. The union is in arrears to the superannuation scheme and is unable to fulfil its financial commitments to its retiring officials and staff.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not clear whether the references that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to draw to the attention of the House are references to the internal superannuation scheme of that organisation or whether they refer to the scheme that is dealt with in the Bill. I suspect that they are different schemes.

Mr. Batiste: In that respect you may be right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is an internal scheme, but there may be people who are involved with both and the rights of those people will be intertwined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House is discussing a Bill that refers to a statutory scheme for the industry. If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to draw the attention of the House to a scheme that relates entirely to the staff and members of the NUM, that has nothing to do with the House and it is out of order.

Mr. Batiste: I was not seeking to do any such thing. However, I am trying to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Bill must provide some interpretation of what is meant by clause 7(4). I repeat that it says:

"References in this section to participation by an organisation include participation by any person as a nominee or on behalf of the organisation."

If a person under the general law of trust is unfit as a trustee to run one superannuation scheme, there has to be a power——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to show that there are internal developments within an organisation that is entitled to nominate people under the Bill that make that organisation unsuitable. That is not an argument to which the House can listen on Third Reading. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get away from that point.

Mr. Batiste: Without in any way wanting to challenge that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I fully accept, the fact remains that as it stands the Bill contains powers to permit the appointment to the boards of the industry's superannuation schemes of people who, by virtue of the points that I should like to raise, if I were permitted to do so, would be manifestly unsuitable. Can any organisation nominate whomsoever it wishes, irrespective of investigation——

Mr. Barron: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I pass to you a copy of the notes on clauses that the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) was given at the Committee's first sitting? Clause 7 says nothing about who will represent the organisations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not being as helpful as he wished to be. However, the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is straining the patience of the House. He is certainly straining mine and he is abusing the limits of the conventions of debate on Third Reading. I hope that we can get away from the internal affairs of an organisation and discuss the Bill. If not, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will resume his seat, because in the very limited time that is available a large number of hon. Members wish to make a contribution to the debate.

Mr. Batiste: I shall not intrude upon the patience of the House, because I shall release this document and will not quote further from it. I have already made the points that I wished to raise.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Batiste: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not doing so, as time is short.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take on board the point that it is necessary to have the power to prevent unsuitable people from being appointed by organisations to these boards. I am not sure whether the Bill contains that power. I seek guidance on that point.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I appreciate that my hon. Friend is not referring to a commercial organisation, but, if he were, would he be using the word "bankrupt" in this context?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Again I must remind the House that we are discussing the Third Reading of the Coal Industry Bill. This is an inappropriate time to discuss matters that may or may not have been included in the Bill and that are not relevant to the Third Reading debate. I hope that the hon. Member for Elmet will either deal with relevant Third Reading points or allow other hon. Members who are anxious to take part in the debate to do so.

Mr. Batiste: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will intrude no further on your patience in this matter, save to make what is a perfectly germane and proper point in the context of the debate on Third Reading. One of the most important things that any person who has worked hard throughout his life is concerned with is that, in the management of his pension fund or superannuation scheme, he will be properly represented. That lies at the core of what we have been proposing in clause 7 of this Bill.

I am seriously concerned that this Bill—and it is on this that I seek advice—may not have sufficient powers within it to ensure that the Secretary of State can reject nominees who are, by any reckoning, unsuitable on the basis of the way in which they have managed other superannuation schemes. That concerns the constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House and it is a matter to which I shall return in great detail as this document is made public later.

6.30 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall be both brief and relevant. That will be quite refreshing after the speeches that we have heard from hon. Members on the Government side today. From the beginning of this afternoon's consideration of this Bill, we have heard dogma and attempts to fuel division. Remarkably little attention has been paid to the coal industry about which we are supposed to be concerned. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) seeks to extract himself from criticism, but when he looks back at his speech he will see that he has sought to capitalise on division rather than pursue a course which would serve the future of the industry and promote healing within the industry. I accept that the hon. Member did refer to the important markets which must exist for coal, and it is that to which I wish to draw attention.

The Minister will accept that the answer that he gave me today to a question that I put down because of the Third Reading of this Bill is a cause for enormous concern, a concern which I hope will be shared by every hon. Member on the Government side. After the serious consideration that the Government are supposed to have given to the Bill I get this answer to the question that I asked today.

I asked the Minister to say

"from which countries coal has been imported during the past 12 months; and what information he has in each case as to the extent to which the United Kingdom price of that coal properly reflects the cost of the production, marketing and distribution."

The answer is that we have imported coal in the past 12 months not only from Australia and the United States but from South Africa, Poland, Canada, West Germany——

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): What has this got to do with the Bill?

Mr. Hardy: It has a lot to do with the Bill, as I will demonstrate. Coal also has come from the Netherlands, Belgium and Colombia.

The Minister will argue that the Government have put money into the industry. The Minister will argue that the Government have provided money for the industry to meet national need. Yet we are paying not the slightest attention to whether our industry is exposed to unfair competition because of dumping by other countries. These countries include South Africa, which allows mining activities that are grossly unsafe. I hope that in the next few days the Minister will look at the example set by West Germany, where the Government and the mining trade unions appear to be moving towards concerted action to respond to the grossly unsafe activity at collieries in South Africa. It would be rather nice if the European response was one of unity.

A few months ago—and this is very relevant to the Third Reading because it follows a point made by the hon. Member for Sherwood—the Minister said that Sleipner gas should not be landed in Britain because we had discovered more gas offshore and could maintain our self-sufficiency. The other reason was that the Government did not want to be in a position of having to pay good money to foreign countries to import gas. Although some Government Members believe, and have said several times recently, that we can easily import cheap coal over the next 20 or 30 years, I suggest that it would be as foolish for us to get into a position of dependence on imported coal as it would have been to get into a similar position with imported gas. We have a great opportunity to build on the reserves to which the hon. Gentleman referred. If we are to do so, the Government must go further and recognise the logic of the enormous increases in productivity that have been achieved in recent months. If those increases in productivity are to have any logic, if the Government are to pursue any degree of consistency, they should make it clear to the country that our future is based on British coal rather than on developing the level of imports which some hon. Members on the Government Benches might like to see.

6.34 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I intervene in the debate briefly and, I hope, relevantly to underline one point, which is that the Bill recognises that there is now more than one major union in the mining industry. It is significant that it took the Government and this Bill to enable this to be done. It is significant that the Opposition have denied that it should be done. I tried to intervene earlier during the speech of the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) to ask him his intentions as regards the union which we are not allowed to mention because it is not in the Bill. I asked whether he and his

[Mr. Richard Alexander]

party believed that it had a right to democratic decisions on matters in that industry. I have so far heard nothing from the Opposition to indicate that they are supportive of people's democratic rights in the industry.

Listening to the barracking of some of the Opposition Members, who suggested that my hon. Friends were spivs or city slickers or somehow in the pay of dishonourable people, I found it a little rich, coming as it did largely from hon. Members who themselves are paid and sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers. They did not declare their interests when they spoke for the mining industry, and I find it a bit thick that they should unjustifiably accuse my hon. Friends of being dishonourable in the things that they said and wanted to do.

If Opposition Members believe in democracy, I hope that their spokesmen will say so in the few moments left for the consideration of this Bill. The Bill is designed to give greater democracy. We on the Government side believe in democracy. We have yet to hear anyone on the Opposition Benches say that this is what the Bill is about and that they support it.

6.37 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): This Bill is purely a stage in preparation for the privatisation of the mining industry. At no time during the Second Reading or in Committee or today has anyone flatly denied that. I am pleased to see the Secretary of State take his place again. Earlier on he seemed very pleased about the achievements of the mining industry in recent months. If people want to crow about 59 pit closures, about 59,000 redundancies since the miners' strike, about wiping out mining communities, they can do so, but I do not believe that these can be called successes. Whatever they are, the Government have created on this run-up to privatisation, on the run-up to this Bill, unemployment and misery in these communities.

The Secretary of State referred to the enterprise scheme. I do not wish to knock that scheme and I never have done, but it is a fact that in my own area, which has suffered severely through the pit closure programme, I have been able to indentify only two jobs created by the Coal Board's enterprise scheme. After my speech during the Second Reading of the Bill, a high-ranking official of the Coal Board took it on himself to write to the local press and question my figures. It was obvious that he had not read my speech. Would I investigate with that senior official? Because, he said, his figures differed from mine: he thought that there were four jobs, 100 per cent. more.

The Government have continued to pile on the agony. To enable the industry to break even by 1988 they are savagely attacking the housing stock of the Coal Board. I went recently to the Kensington Hilton when houses were being auctioned. What I saw was repulsive. There were racketeers and property speculators; you name it, they were there bidding. I recognise that the Government have done all this to the mining people in an attempt to run down the industry rapidly so as to prepare for privatisation.

Mr. Barron: On the housing stock, I understand that the Coal Board has temporarily suspended sales. This morning I received a letter sent on behalf of a Mr. T. Ward, 21 Coronation Avenue, Kiveton Park, whose house was sold late last year. It has now been resold to someone in London. Utter confusion has been created because people do not know from one month to the next who their landlord is or what protection they have.

Mr. Lofthouse: That is the case. One lady, the wife of a disabled miner, attempted to purchase her property but could not get a mortgage before the closing date. She then went to the auction to try to buy the house. She was unsuccessful because a speculator or racketeer bought the whole block. Within two days someone was knocking at her door, offering her the house for a profit of over 30 per cent. That is what the Government have done to the mining community, the miners and their families.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) talked about 300 years of reserves. If the Government continue to rape the mining industry, the reserves will be down to 50 years.

6.42 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I welcome the Bill, which will be particularly welcome in south Derbyshire and to the UDM at Rawdon and Ellistown collieries. The most amazing thing has happened. We have heard a great deal of opposition to the Bill on Second Reading, on Report and now. It is said that the reason for the opposition is that the Bill is a prelude to the privatisation of the Coal Board. Of course, the true reason for the opposition has been exposed today. A rearguard action is being fought by Opposition Members with close affiliations to an association which we now know to be bankrupt. We know that people in that organisation have been acting in breach of trust and that the organisation should be the subject of an inquiry. The funding of the NUM should be inquired into. The Labour party has tried desperately to keep the NUM as the sole and supreme union in the mining industry and to exclude the UDM. That is why it has opposed the Bill.

The local leader of the UDM in my constituency, someone by the name of Horace Sankey, has been trying to do a deal with the local Labour party which has said that it is not opposed to the Bill nor to the UDM. I have said several times that the miners are being misled by the local UDM leader because he has close affiliations with the Labour party. The true picture is that the Labour party is opposed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has heard me chide other hon. Members for straying beyond the limits of a proper debate on Third Reading. There is nothing in the Bill about the Labour party. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get back to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Ashby: There is opposition to the Bill from the major Opposition party, which I believe is known as the Labour party. People in my constituency should know the reason for that opposition. The opposition relates entirely to the fact that the Labour party knows the precarious state that the NUM is in and is trying to maintain a bankrupt union.

We heard the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) refer to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) who has been fighting a long action in support of the extension of the concessionary coal allowance, an action on which I have supported him. Not for the first time have we heard the hon. Member for Bolsover try to claim for himself a campaign in which he

had no interest. Time and time again I have challenged him to say that he was in the least bit interested in concessionary coal allowances. Belatedly, realising his position, he has started to claim for himself something that he has no right to claim. I notice that he is not in the Chamber now. He made his allegation and disappeared, which is typical of him.

Mr. Walter Harrison (Wakefield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not right that, when an hon. Member intends to attack another hon. Member, he gives notification to that hon. Member that he will do so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a convention of the House.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Member for Bolsover came in, made a number of ridiculous allegations, used the foulest language in respect of hon. Members and then disappeared. He does not deserve to be told of any proposed attack.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that to be railed at and insulted in such a way by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is probably the surest sign that a Member is an honourable Member and is doing his duty properly?

Mr. Ashby: I agree with that observation.

I end my speech as I began. I welcome the Bill which introduces a large measure of democracy and which will give the UDM a voice in areas where it has a right to be heard. Indeed, it is essential that the UDM should have a voice in those areas because of the revelations we have heard about the NUM.

6.48 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): On Second Reading we warned the House of the great difficulty we would have in Committee of trying to make a job of the Bill because of its political and electioneering aspects. We should not be cynical about it. In Committee we did the best job we could.

When the Secretary of State opened the debate he referred to clause 1. It was right that the House should have some discussion as to why the name of the National Coal Board has been changed to British Coal. We understand that there was no consultation about that. However, we understood from clause 1 that the Government were changing the name and that was that. We therefore had a debate on the subject.

We had a very long debate in Committee about housing. The importance of that topic has been borne out by the scandals that have been revealed about the sales of National Coal Board housing. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) raised the subject in an Adjournment debate in which he exposed the scandal about the sale of National Coal Board houses. We had a worthwhile discussion in Committee on that subject.

We have heard little today about the financial provisions in the Bill. Some hon. Members will know that when a money resolution is moved in the House it is very difficult to discuss the financial provisions. Nevertheless, we did as well as we could in Committee on that topic. We tried to warn that even within the NCB there is doubt as to whether the financial provisions in the Bill will be adequate to deal with the problems in the coal industry. The Opposition must place a marker on that. We have grave doubts as to whether the financial provisions in the Bill will meet the problems in the industry.

The Secretary of State referred to clauses 5, 6 and 7 and how the Opposition sat on their hands and allowed Government Members to articulate their case about giving rights to minority unions. We had good reason to do that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) made it perfectly clear that we would cover that point in a new clause. We would test whether Conservative Members were democrats and libertarians like the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth), who represents the alliance. We proved that they were not libertarians. Under the new clause, all registered trade unions in the mining industry would have rights to bargaining, conciliation and consultation. We received a strange reply from the Minister. He said that it was a Scargill type of amendment despite the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East said that the amendment was based on the convention of the International Labour Organisation. It stretches the imagination to claim that Mr. Scargill drafted the ILO convention. We won the argument and the debate in Committee. I invite any hon. Member to read the reports of the Committee stage. We wiped the floor with the Government. We emerged as the libertarians and democrats because we wanted rights for all, not rights for one particular section.

The Government are impaled to some extent on a Bill that has great political content. It is an electioneering Bill and a pit closure Bill. It will do nothing for the mining industry, and I invite my hon. and right hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby to vote against it.

6.53 pm

Mr. David Hunt: The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has made many contributions in coal industry debates over the years. However, on reflection, he will consider the contribution he has just made as his worst. He in no way addressed the important issues of the industry. In many ways his spech followed that of his right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), who went over the top almost in his first sentence when he described the financial provisions of the Bill as a pathetic response. If he deems as pathetic a Bill that provides at least £1·1 billion for the future of the coal industry, but, much more important, a three-year investment programme of £2 billion following on from an investment programme under this Government of £5 billion, his use of the English language is to be greatly deplored.

We should not just deplore the way in which the right hon. Member for Salford, East used the English language. His lack of use of the English language in Committee is also to be deplored. He and his hon. Friends sat silent on the crucial clauses 5, 6 and 7. That must attract the condemnation of this House.

In relation to the financial provisions, I can tell my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway), Elmet (Mr. Batiste), Newark (Mr. Alexander) and Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) that they are correct to recognise that morale and productivity in this great industry are high as the men look to the future with greater confidence than ever before. It is far better for the future of this great industry for us to look to the future now and grasp the opportunities.

[Mr. David Hunt]

The past few years have not been easy for the industry. At least now the possibility exists for the first time of ending the long-standing preoccupation with pit closures and manpower rundown and of replacing that with optimism for the future. I readily grasp that opportunity and, under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I am proud to be the Minister responsible for coal with such exciting opportunities lying ahead.

However, I want to return to the points made by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) which were ignored by so many Opposition Members—the provisions for fair representation in the industry. As my hon. Friends have explained, unlike the Labour party and like on this occasion the alliance, the Government are committed to the basic principles of democracy that led to the birth of the UDM during those dark days of the miners' dispute. The successful efforts of the working miners to sustain the coal industry——

Mr. Barron: Sponsored by the NUM.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should not ignore this point. I know who is sponsored by the NUM. Let him not follow their line on this point.

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the successful efforts of the working miners to sustain the coal industry through that evil and unnecessary strike must never be forgotten. I am afraid that Opposition Members too readily pretend that the efforts of the working miners, now represented through the UDM, will be forgotten. They hope that the UDM will go away. As other hon. Members have stressed, the UDM will not go away.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hunt: I will give way in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet has revealed the scandalous state of affairs that will need urgent examination, in particular, by the miners in the industry. The report to which my hon. Friend referred—and of which the hon. Member for Midlothian is aware—states that those dominated by Scargill have done tremendous damage not only to their industry but also to their union. It is important now to preserve and enhance democracy in the mining industry. Sadly, in Committee, the Labour party was silent and running scared of Scargill. I described Labour Members politely as parliamentary puppets on the Scargill string. By opposing the Bill on a three-line Whip on Second Reading, and by failing to support the vital clauses on fair representation, the Labour party has reneged on the basic principles of union democracy on which the trade union movement was founded.

There is only one explanation for the silence of Labour Members—subservience to Scargill and opposition to the UDM. Of course there is a great future for all those working in the coal industry. However, it must be a fair future—fair for the industry and for its employees.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 126.

Division No. 84] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allen, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Maclennan, Robert
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard

Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Francis Maude and
Mr. Richard Ryder

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Heffer, Eric S.
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wareing, Robert
Wealch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

City of London (Various Powers) Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

7.11 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I undertake this task for several reasons, first, because my hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) is a Minister, so is debarred from speaking. Secondly, he has been a close colleague and personal friend for more than 20 years and has asked me if I would help him out in this capacity. It also gives me an opportunity to repay some of the great kindnesses shown to me by his late father who was a distinguished Member and Minister in this House.

My City connections are that I am a member of the Guild of Freemen of the City of London and that I went to the City of London school. Therefore, I have always taken a great delight in what is done in the City. Tonight is somewhat unusual because the Bill had an unopposed Second Reading, has now come back from Committee and we are having this debate because the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) tabled a blocking motion. Because we are now on Third Reading, which is a different debate from Second Reading, I shall just describe briefly the Bill's three main proposals. I shall not weary the House with descriptions of a vast number of other useful but less important items.

First, I shall talk about the Billingsgate fish market. The City has had rights over Billingsgate for about six centuries. In 1982 the market moved to the Isle of Dogs and that was an example of the City's support for the regeneration of docklands, of which it was a pioneer. The City is a tenant in the Isle of Dogs of the Tower Hamlets borough council with which it has an amicable working arrangement. The market provides about 700 jobs for local people.

As the development of docklands has proceeded, new developments have come along and new schemes and roads have been required. The boundary of the present market may need to be adjusted to fit in with those proposals. Part of the Bill allows for that adjustment and it is proposed to achieve that by what seems to be the best solution, which is an exchange of land. That will also give an opportunity for straightening an irregular site. The City has had discussions with the market traders and the Transport and General Workers Union. As a result, certain amendments will be proposed in the other place to specify the clause's objectives in terms of land exchange. The proposals have the full support of the traders and of the union.

Secondly, there is the question of street trading, which is covered in clauses 5 to 15 and basically covers what Londoners know as Petticoat lane. When in about the mid-1960s there was a major road improvement scheme in Aldgate, several stall-holders with pitches in the Sunday market in that part of Middlesex street which is now in Tower Hamlets were displaced. I am sure that I am not alone in being among those who have gone happily to Petticoat lane. I do not share the experience of some people of having their own watch sold back to them at the other end of the market but it was a pleasant visit.

The City agreed to accommodate the traders and a system of licensing was provided under the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1965. Under that Act each of the then displaced traders was entitled to a licence and also to nominate a successor to his pitch on his death. The legislation did not provide for further nominations or for granting street trading licences to others. If that position continued, the Middlesex street market—Petticoat lane—would die. The traders did not wish that to happen and they asked for the City's help. Although it was not obliged to do so, the City agreed to remedy that defect under this Bill and a new code was provided to enable the City to grant further street trading licences. The traders strongly support the Bill's proposals.

I should perhaps put one gloss on street trading, and that is to be found in clause 15, which deals with street photographers. Many of those who operate around Petticoat lane are a nuisance. They operate with pet monkeys and parrots and they let the monkeys hop on to people's shoulders and frighten them. It is considered that there should be licensing of photographers such as the licensing that exists in a vast number of other Acts. There is a clause similar to the one in this Bill in the Greater Manchester Act 1981, the West Midlands County Council Act 1980, the County of Merseyside Act 1980 and the Clwyd Act 1985. So there would be by no means any precedent being created. I stress that the licensing will not affect those undertaking legitimate business, such as journalists.

In the third part of the Bill additional powers are needed for sanitation and drainage because of the type and density of buildings in the square mile and the problems caused by the immense daytime population. These proposals are supported by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and many others who must undertake certain works. The rest, as I have said, is a miscellaneous collection of worthy items which I could explain, if necessary.

I do not know what to explain because, most unusually, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has failed to respond to requests from either the City of London corporation or its parliamentary agents to say what is worrying him. That gave them no opportunity to try to assist him with any problem that he has. Equally, I would like to have assisted him but, not knowing what he wants to say, I have had to confine myself to the major items in the Bill.

I will, if I may, ask the leave of the House if need be to respond at the end to any matters that are raised, but I hope that the House will give this Bill its Third Reading.

7.18 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I must tell the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) that I tabled a blocking motion on the Bill to secure a short debate. I fully understand and appreciate that it would have been more appropriate for that to have been done on Second Reading, but for a variety of reasons it was not. I had an opportunity of getting a short debate on Third Reading and I am most surprised, indeed gratified, to see such a large attendance for a Bill that I should have thought would have gone through fairly quickly. I do not intend to detain the House long, but there may be some points which Conservative Members wish to make.

The Bill has not been debated on the Floor of the House. It was not opposed on Second Reading, but was passed as unopposed private business. While I realise that the Chairman and hon. Members on the Committee of the

unopposed Bill will have scrutinised it, there is no substitute for a good free-ranging debate on the Floor. I appreciate that I cannot have a truly free-ranging debate today because we are now on Third Reading, so I shall stay close to the provisions of the Bill.

No Bill involving the City of London should pass easily through the House. The title of the Bill, City of London (Various Powers) Bill, reflects the great range of powers, abilities and responsibilities that the City of London retains. As all hon. Members know, the City of London remains a highly controversial body in local government terms. It is amazing that it has managed to survive every local government reorganisation this century. I wish that that could be said of the late Greater London council, of which I had the great honour to be chairman. Perhaps we could learn from the City how to survive against the odds.

The Herbert Commission report of 1957-60, which led to the London Government Act 1963, states:

"If we were to be strictly logical we should recommend the amalgamation of the City and Westminster. But logic has its limits and the City lies outside them."

One understands that the City can defy logic, but from the Bill it is clear that it not only defies logic but has responsibilities which lie well outside its geographical boundaries. The Bill demonstrates that in marked respects.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate that the overwhelming part of the Bill is to be welcomed, so it would not be opposed this evening. Certainly the amendments in respect of Billingsgate are welcome and, as I know, were the result of lengthy discussions with the Billingsgate traders and the TGWU. I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) who played a significant part in initiating those discussions and reaching an agreed solution for amendments to be tabled in another place.

Similarly, Clauses 5 to 13 are undoubtedly urgently needed to provide for the continuation of that part of the Middlesex market which is in the City. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) who interested himself greatly in those clauses.

I have reservations about three clauses in particular, the first of which is clause 19. As hon. Members will see, the clause would allow the City to make byelaws under the Animal Health Act 1981 in respect of the animal quarantine station at Heathrow airport without the approval of the Minister. We should not agree to that extension of powers, especially as it does not involve ministerial agreement. The Act is enforced by the corporation and one may say that the City is, in effect, a strategic authority in that respect for 14 London boroughs.

The London Government Act 1963 made the Corporation of London responsible for the Diseases of Animals Act 1950, which related to imported animals throughout the whole of Greater London, including Heathrow airport. Following an outbreak of rabies in 1969 the legislation on the importation of animals was strengthened and under the terms of the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order animals can be landed only at ports with an approved holding facility. Heathrow is by far the busiest port in the United Kingdom for animal movements and, as a consequence, the corporation decided to build the animal quarantine station, which was opened in 1977. It is the most sophisticated portal animal station in the world and is concerned with preventing disease entering the United Kingdom and safeguarding animal welfare.

More than 500,000 animals and birds pass through the station each year. The House will wish to be associated with a big "Thank you" to the staff at Heathrow airport who do such an excellent job in protecting our livestock from the importation of animal diseases, especially rabies. I should like to be on record as having thanked the staff for the work that they do.

However, that function should be carried out by a strategic regional authority and perhaps the GLC should have been responsible for it. That leads me to an important point. When the GLC was being broken up Ministers said that it was being broken up so as to relate services much more closely to the communities for which the services were afforded. It was difficult to do that for animal health and it was certainly difficult to do so for transport, the Thames barrier, the fire service and road traffic management. Therefore, the services were transferred either to Government Departments or to indirectly elected boards.

If the Government were being absolutely consistent in their local government changes in London, they should have placed the quarantine section at Heathrow under the responsibility of a Government Department. Perhaps the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would have been the most appropriate. Clause 19 demonstrates, interestingly, the inconsistency of the Government's proposals for the structure of local government and its functions in London. Why should the City of London be responsible for activities at Heathrow airport which is on the other side of the Greater London area? That is why I cannot agree to clause 19, and, if the hon. Gentleman is given an opportunity to reply, perhaps he will explain precisely why that clause is required.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I question whether the hon. Gentleman is being logical about the quarantine station at Heathrow airport. Heathrow is the greatest international airport in the world and it is our national airport. If we are to be logical, the Government should take responsibility for that and, indeed, the hon. Gentleman said that. The City of London is contributing nationally £400 million a year or more through rates distribution and is responsible for earning more than £7,000 million a year in trade, so surely it is a question——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman should relate his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Chapman: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am saying that in practice it is perfectly consistent that the quarantine station at Heathrow airport should continue to be managed by the City of London.

Mr. Banks: Perhaps now the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) will appreciate the difficulties that I have in speaking on this Bill and staying carefully within the confines of its clauses. I would dearly love to enter into a debate with the hon. Gentleman about the role and function of the City of London in respect of the Greater London area, local government structure, its contribution to the wealth of the nation and so on. However, I would be caught out by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in much the same way as the hon. Gentleman. On a more suitable occasion we should get to grips with these problems.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can tell us exactly what body he proposes should take over this facility at Heathrow given that, on his admission, it has worked perfectly well over the years and has involved no cost to central Government.

Mr. Banks: I said and repeat that it has worked admirably but the same could be said of the London fire brigade, the Thames barrier or London Regional Transport. Yet all those services were taken away from the Greater London council. Those functions were taken away, according to Government argument, to rationalise local government structure. If we apply that same, so-called logic to local government structures, why is the City of London—I do not deny it does a good job—still in charge of something that is not only outside its boundaries but unrelated to anything that it does?

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): If the hon. Gentleman thought that the Government were wrong before, he must therefore think that they are right now.

Mr. Banks: One can be consistent as to whether one is right or wrong. I am not accepting the political arguments advanced for dismantling the Greater London council, but I can see the logic in that argument and all I am saying is that it should be extended to the City of London's functions. One is involved at two levels—one is trying to find logical structures and one is also influenced by political feelings.

My feelings towards the City of London are biased. I am totally opposed to its continued existence because it is an anachronistic institution which should have been abolished many years ago. I could continue but there will be an opportunity—not tonight—to pursue that strand of the argument to a greater degree.

I shall try to move with haste as I do not wish to detain the House. Clause 22 of the Bill seeks to amend the Epping Forest Act 1878. I wish to declare an interest straight away. I live in the district of London that is known as Forest Gate. It is on the edge of Epping Forest and Forest Gate is in my constituency of Newham, North-West. Epping forest covers some 6,000 acres. Those hon. Members who have not had the great pleasure of exploring the forest will not be aware that it is situated in the east of London.

I immediately appreciate and indeed approve of the 19th century reasons for the City of London securing the forest, but in view of the Local Government Act 1985 it would be consistent with that Act if the forest were run by a joint committee of the boroughts and districts in which it lies.

The clause—I realise that I must talk about that—relates to the register of commoners. The register was for those who were eligible to vote for the verderers section 30 of the Epping Forest Act 1878. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has many family links with the history of Epping forest and perhaps if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he can find an interesting way to tell us about it.

The verderers sit on the City's Epping forest committee. Paragraph 5 of the fourth schedule of the 1878 Act says:

"where a commoner is under age or of unsound mind or a married woman, his or her guardian, committee or husband shall be entitled to be on the register in his or her place."

I find it intriguing since it is linking those of an unsound mind with married women. It goes to show the great depth of sexism that existed in Victorian Britain. Obviously, when a woman married she became nothing more than the chattle of her husband. Clearly this must be changed and that is what the proposed clause seeks to do.

In all honesty I must report to the House that when I got up at 5 o'clock on Tuesday morning to get to the House for a ten-minute Bill, my wife said that she must have been mad to marry me. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] As a matter of fact, I could not think of anything to say at 5 am except that, if she thought that, she would have been ruled out on two counts from being included in the list of commoners for Epping forest. My wife was not impressed by the argument. However, I told her that when this Bill goes through the House married women would be allowed to be included on the register of commoners——

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I wonder whether my hon. Friend can tell us whether he met with success in his ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Banks: Yes, indeed. I was successful. Who else would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning? The Bill will be on the subject of fixed Parliaments for a five-year period. I include that as an advertisement if hon. Members wish to support me on 4 February.

In clause 22 the City is seeking to rectify this peculiarly sexist image but it has not done so yet and this is something about which I wish to ask the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate.

This bit of Victorian nonsense will not be removed until 1991 because the appointed day means 1 September 1991. I assume that is the next date for voting verderers on to the committee because the last election for verderers of Epping forest was a year ago. I would like to know what happens if a verderer decides to take the equivalent of the Chiltern Hundreds or if a verderer was trampled by one of the herds of grazing cattle. That in itself is a problem. Many households in the area of Newham, North-East have had cattle wander in from Wanstead flats, which are part of Epping forest and start munching up the gladioli and other herbaceous borders that are common in the area.

Obviously there is always a danger from stray cattle. Indeed, people in the area like to see this bit of rural England coming down their front paths. I suggested that the grazing rights should be stopped in Epping forest, but I encountered a fairly resilient degree of public opinion expressing the contrary view. Being a good democrat, I decided that the cattle should be left to adorn the constituency of my next-door neighbour the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton).

Qualification for voting for the verderers is still based on owning or occupying half an acre of unbuilt land. This means a property qualification is still involved in a partially democratic process of the City. Of course, the City has maintained practices that have long been abolished in other boroughs and in local government. For example, it still has a business vote and it still has aldermen—a practice that has long since disappeared elsewhere. But the City is always able to defy logic and the reorganisation of local government. Clause 22 again demonstrates that. However, as it goes, I must support it. Nevertheless, it certainly does not go far or fast enough.

Mr. Hanley: Does the hon. Gentleman feel any gratitude towards the City in that in 1985-86 it cost the City £1·5 million to maintain Epping forest? That is to the

benefit of all those who use that excellent area, but it costs local ratepayers absolutely nothing and is all at the expense of the City.

Mr. Banks: I am for ever grateful to the City for its contribution to the ratepayers of Newham, Waltham Forest or, indeed, Epping urban district council. They benefit, but I am talking about logical local government structures and about relating services to the local authority in which they are provided. I am just being logical, and it seems to me that there can be no logic in the City running Epping forest, Wanstead flats, Chingford golf course, West Ham park, Burnham beeches — the one that Hammer Horrors always used — the Kent and Surrey commons or Highgate woods. I quickly slipped those into my speech to demonstrate that we are not just talking about Epping forest. The City has acres of green land throughout the whole of the Greater London area. No doubt all those who use those recreational areas are grateful to the City, but the question is whether it is logical. It is logical to be grateful, but is it logical for the City to run them still?

Clause 24 relates to the Central London Railway Act 1892. I have secured a copy of that Act. Section 28(5) refers to Mansion house station and says:

> "Except as regards any entrances facing the Royal Exchange the Commissioners or the Commissioner of the City police shall have powers to close all public entrances to the station or subways at such times and for such purposes as they may deem necessary."

I do not understand why the entrances facing the Royal Exchange could not be closed, unless they had to stay open for people dashing out in order to get out of Czarist bonds and into other stocks.

Mr. Hanley: I am sorry to intervene so often in the hon. Gentleman's speech but perhaps it will help to bring his comments to a close. I believe that that entrance had to remain open because there was a public convenience there, to which the public needed ready access. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that as something provided by the City for people from all parts of the country who happen to be visiting the City.

Mr. Banks: I would always defer to the hon. Gentleman when it comes to a knowledge of public conveniences around London. Indeed, I am very grateful for that piece of information. In many ways it demonstrates how useful this sort of debate can be, because one can, at times, exchange incredibly useful information.

Why does clause 24 seek to give similar powers to the corporation and to the Commissioner of Police in respect of the entrances to Bank underground station for whatever purposes "they may deem necessary"? Enormous powers are being given to the City corporation. Why should the City corporation be granted those additional powers by the House? I should certainly like to oppose the clause.

Clause 2(1) talks about the Commissioner of Police for the City. That is another anachronism. The City has its own police force, and that is unique to London. Ministers jump up and say that it is nonsense for London boroughs to want to become involved in the democratic accountability of the Metropolitan police, but they never refer back to the City, which has had responsibility for policing its own area for many years. This is another perfect example of how the City is always made the exception to the rule when it comes to democratic structures, democratic processes or London local government.

I heard what the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) said, and I do not wish to detain the House further. I was, of course, thinking of calling a Division on Third Reading, but clearly we are not particularly well equipped for that. All those who promised me their attendance have clearly failed, and so on this occasion I shall not push the debate to a vote. Nevertheless, the Bill exemplifies the City's illogical position in respect of its powers and responsibilities within the structure of local government. It is an institution long overdue for change, and that will be the task of the next Labour Government.

7.45 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): I always enjoy listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), and it is a pleasure to support the Bill's Third Reading which he so agreeably moved.

If the Labour party has its way, there will not be many more such private Bills. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for example, is eager to destroy the ancient traditions and institutions of the City of London. But, although they offend his logic, they are cherished at home and honoured abroad. Indeed, I think that Tory Members would be inclined to say blow logic if illogicality gives efficiency and satisfaction. It is apparent from the hon. Gentleman's speech that the Opposition's hostility to the City arises in part from their fury that the GLC is no more, and is so little lamented.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) intervened. I have no interests in the City, but I salute the City corporation in their capacity of Conservators of Epping Forest, whose northern parishes I have the honour to represent. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West had something to say about clause 22. He is un-English in his addiction to logic, and he spoke of the City corporation as a strategic authority. He mentioned, in particular, the animal quarantine arrangements and animal welfare provision at Heathrow airport. Hon. Members will want to echo what he said in generous praise of the staff there. But the difference between him and me, and no doubt my hon. Friends, is that when the public obtain a service at no cost to the taxpayer, we are glad and he is sorry.

My experience of the City's extra territorial responsibilities in connection with Epping forest has been a happy one. Indeed, when the GLC was being abolished, I proposed that the Lord Mayor and the corporation of London should thereafter not only serve as a unifying symbol and focus of loyalty for Londoners, but also provide a framework for those common services that fell outside the responsibility of the London borough councils. The Friends of Hainault Forest, under my presidency, also proposed that the City corporation should take on Hainault forest, which once formed part of the great forest of Waltham or forest of Essex, or, as we usually call it now, Epping forest. Unfortunately, we did not succeed.

The purpose of clause 22 of the Bill was explained by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. Clearly, the schedule in the Epping Forest Act 1878, which he quoted, is offensive. Any commoner in the forest parishes may be registered as an elector for the choice every seven years of

[Sir John Biggs-Davison]

the four verderers. Verderers provide local representation in the management of the forest, which is run extra-territorially by the City corporation through the Epping Forest Committee.

Contrary to the belief of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, who wanted to bring in a greater measure of local control of Epping forest, the fact that, for more than a century, it has been under a remote authority has preserved it from the increasingly powerful pressures of local builders and developers.

A certain member of the public noticed that the offensive terms of the schedule appeared in the literature that was circulated for the election of verderers. As a result of that, the Equal Opportunities Commission wrote that, in its view, the provision was:

"harmful to the status of married women and certainly against the spirit of the anti-discrimination legislation."

As far as I can determine, there is no example of an occasion on which a husband decided to exercise the right to register himself in place of his wife, but the right is offensive. I rather like anachonisms, but I do not like this one.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 does not right the wrong because of a provision which states that the Act does not render unlawful

"any act done by a person if it were necessary for him to do it in order to comply with a requirement of an Act of Parliament passed before this Act."

Clearly, the Epping Forest Act 1878 was passed before the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The House will welcome the steps being taken by the City of London Corporation to remove this obsolete and offensive disfranchisement.

7.52 pm

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I wish to make three comments about clauses 7, 19 and 22 of the Bill. Even if the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) voted against clause 19, he would not in any way solve the problem. Other legislation would be needed. As you correctly said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that debate will have to wait for another day. I echo the point that the quarantine service at Heathrow is a splendid service provided free by the City of London for the benefit of the nation.

I listened with a great deal of sympathy to the criticisms implicitly made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West about the sexism contained in clause 22, the reasons for which have been explained by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison). My surname, Chapman, twice contravenes the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. I should like to see that measure reorganised to accommodate at least my political embarrassment on that score.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) made an excellent point about the trading licences in Middlesex street. Although we have abolished the county, thank goodness we are not abolishing the street which is sometimes colloquially known as Petticoat lane. Again, my surname plays a modest part in clause 7. I admit that, according to Chaucer, a chapman is a pedlar of cheap, down-market goods.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is a good description of the Government.

Mr. Chapman: Perhaps there is hope for me in it, then. I should add that I have no interest in Middlesex street, or that part of it which is in the City of London, but it is right to pass clause 7 because it honours a commitment that was given in good faith. It is no fault of the City corporation that it would act outside the law if it were to grant these licences to these people and their successors.

I welcome clause 7 and the Bill as a whole. Although this matter is for another day and another debate, Londoners in particular and the country in general should acknowledge and put on record the great contribution that the City makes to our life and to the revenue of the Government and local authorities. I pay tribute to the City corporation and wish it well in the future.

7.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): It may be helpful if, at this point, I intervene to give a brief explanation of the Government's view on the Bill. Before I do so, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) for bringing the Bill before the House. It is apparent that the narrow scope of the Bill causes a sense of frustration amongst hon. Members, especially when the short title looks so promising for a continuation about the great debate about London government. I must admit to sharing the sense of frustration at not being able to debate the wider issues tonight.

It is a pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) in the Chamber. I served as his PPS for a happy period until last September. I am delighted to see him here, and I am sure that he is disappointed at not being able, by reason of the office that he holds, to participate in this interesting debate.

It is traditional that, on private Bills, the Government take a neutral stance, and this Bill is no exception to that rule. The Government have considered the content of the Bill and have no objection in principle to the powers sought by the corporation. It is for the promoters to persuade Parliament that the powers they are seeking are necessary and justified. My Department and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary are still negotiating with the promoters on some outstanding points, and I hope that these will be cleared up satisfactorily.

The Bill was unopposed in Committee in March last year. In the Government's view, none of the matters raised tonight is of sufficient importance to warrant further delay to the progress of this Bill, and I recommend that it be allowed to proceed.

7.57 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I echo the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) and others in supporting the Bill and in refuting an argument raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). The hon. Gentleman said that it was inconsistent Government policy to allow the City of London to look after the quarantine station at Heathrow, as it has done for many years and with great success, and also to allow it to retain its rights, powers and generosity over Epping forest and so many other areas within Greater London. It is not inconsistent to allow an authority to continue to run these matters if it does so with due care, proper frugality, and proper economy and provides an excellent service to all

who use its facilities. It is not against Governments policy to allow a fully democratic authority that has been nothing but of benefit to the nation. It also is not against Government policy to allow a Bill that has involved consultation in the widest sense. The Bill relates to an organisation in the City of London that has the acquiescence of all the people who have been interested in its various parts.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how he can claim that the City of London is truly democratic when, for example, the aldermen of the City are elected for life and have a business vote?

Mr. Hanley: It is not undemocratic to allow a vote to people who have a direct interest in the area concerned. If 99 per cent. of those who occupy the City happen to be those who run businesses in that area, surely it is democratic to give those people a vote. It would be undemocratic to remove the vote in other areas, but that debate is outside the ambit of this evening's discussion. Therefore, I shall not be drawn on that.

It is wholly within the Government's policy to allow a successful organisation, such as the City of London Corporation, the powers which show how it is successfully dealing with changing situations, for example, the way in which it is dealing with Middlesex street market, Billingsgate market, the drainage and sanitation problems, and the large population within the square mile where the type and density of buildings are always changing and the buildings are getting ever higher. The powers would also allow the corporation to show the way in which it deals with the problems faced by tourists in London, for example, the problems that have occurred because of the use of animals by photographic traders, and the way in which it deals with the City walkways.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West will remember the way in which the corporation helped to fund the Museum of London. I know that the hon. Gentleman has great confidence in that musem because he has deposited some valuable items there, to be exhibited to the general public for all time.

I know that all hon. Members are grateful to the corporation for the work that it has done for many hundreds of years—indeed, for a considerably longer time than the Greater London council existed.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Hanley: If the Greater London council had carried on its business with the responsibility that is shown by the City of London Corporation, it might still be in existence.

8.3 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): As I listened to the pertinent and felicitous intervention of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, I could not help but think, would that the Government's neutrality was always as benevolent as tonight, and would that ministerial interventions were always as brief and to the point.

I shall be brief, but I should like to do something that no hon. Member has yet been charitable enough to do, and that is to thank the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for giving us the opportunity to put on record the value of the City of London. The hon. Gentleman has performed a signal service and we are all much in his debt. As a freeman of the City and a resident of it, I believe that it functions with great distinction.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My hon. Friend is also a voter within the City.

Mr. Cormack: If the House ever embraced the doctrine that logic should be our master in all things, we should be in for real trouble. Logic is a good enough servant, but it is a bad master. I am happy that there should be certain illogicalities. I recognise that there are some in the City of London, but, despite that, it does work. It is a proud flagship for Britain. Long may it sail into the future, and long may we support it.

8.6 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Like the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), my hon. Friends and I are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for affording us the opportunity of this short debate on certain aspects of the operation of the City of London.

As you have made clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not the occasion for a debate on the constitution of the City. However, I should like to add that the Labour party is about to state, in its discussion document on the future policies of a Labour Government, that it would review the position of the City of London, because the City's present constitution reflects the time when the City was extremely populous. Many people—not just those in the Labour party—take the view that the constitution should be modernised.

It is also worth reflecting upon the fact that on many occasions in previous centuries the City of London corporation, the common council, adopted a radical stance and was opposed to the Government. For example, in the 18th century arguments on whether the then hon. Member for Middlesex should be allowed to take his seat——

Sir J. Biggs-Davison: And the 17th century——

Mr. Straw: Indeed, there were similar arguments in the 17th century.

Our concern is not in any way to throw away the goods because much that the City of London does is good, but to bring the City and its constitution up to date.

I should also like to comment on the percentage over grant-related expenditure assessment, and expenditure increases. You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that no debate on the problems faced by good Labour authorities is ever complete without a reference to the fact that under the curious system of block grant—rate support grant—that the Government have established, the authority that shows the greatest increase in expenditure in the past seven years is the City of London with an increase of about 300 per cent. The authority that shows the greatest percentage increase over its grant-related expenditure assessment is also the City of London. However, somehow the City always manages to escape rate-capping, while authorities with far more moderate increases in expenditure, for example, Islington and Newham, are somehow caught.

I shall turn now to the merits of the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West recited, my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) were heavily involved in those parts of the Bill that relate to Billingsgate market and those that relate to the Middlesex street market. My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend are

[Mr. Straw]

anxious that those provisions, as they now appear in the Bill, become law as quickly as possible. I pay tribute to both of them for their work in ensuring that those matters are included in the Bill as it is cast at present.

The other part of the Bill that has aroused discussion relates to the verderers of Epping forest. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West spoke about my family connections with Epping forest. I shall not go into all those connections, except to say that in the previous century my family were among the villagers in the then agricultural village of Loughton who, along with many other people, fought the lords of the manor to prevent the enclosure of the forest.

Sir J. Biggs-Davison: Hear, hear.

Mr. Straw: I am glad that I am joined in that by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison). The first consequence of that great battle, in which much was at stake because the villagers had the rights of lopping and grazing in the forest, was the founding of the Commons Preservation Society — not the House of Commons but green commons. The society weighed in in support of the villagers. Legal actions were brought against the lords of the manor and, some time later, the City of London agreed to run the great forest for the benefit of the people of Essex and London. That was confirmed when Queen Victoria came to open the new forest.

As I have said, I disagree to some extent with the way in which the City is run. I speak as somebody who was brought up almost in the forest. The concrete playground of my primary school was exactly opposite the forest. My family still live there, and I cannot say that I can recollect any serious arguments about the way in which the City have administered the forest.

The Bill is a modest amendment and it is important within the context of equal opportunities legislation. I hope that it is agreed to.

8.9 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I am not sure if the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is related to Herne the Hunter in that he played in the forest. I seem to remember that Herne came to a rather strange end. The hon. Member implied that in the year 2005 the future of the City may be reviewed. All I would say is that the future of the City was reviewed not long ago. It was reviewed following the Royal Commission that produced the London Government Act 1963. However, I should remind the hon. Gentleman that his comments on GREA were an echo of a parliamentary question tabled by his hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). The hon. Member for Copeland was shot down in flames by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin) and we heard no more from him on that subject.

We have had a strange evening. We have all been debating one subject while behind that facade was another much greater and more contentious issue champing at the bit. However, with your help, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was not allowed to come under starter's orders. I look forward to that occasion. On a previous occasion I have defended the City against the philistines on the Opposition Benches who wish to abolish it. I am sure that that time will come again. I doubt if the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and I have ever had such an agreeable confrontation. Perhaps that should happen more often.

I found it difficult to help my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) to remain within the terms of the Equal Opportunities Commission except perhaps to address him as, "Person, person" because I cannot think of a colloquialism for, "chap". However, it may come to me.

The immortal words on neutrality read out by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State struck a familiar note. I have read such words on many occasions with great unhappiness. I am sure that perhaps on this occasion my hon. Friend would have liked to contribute more to the discussion.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for his contribution and for helping me to obtain the information that I needed to answer some of the questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) chided me for not having praised the City. I did that deliberately because I thought that if I praised it too much it might have a counter-effect on other hon. Members which, in turn, might have made the debate more contentious. I yield to no one in my admiration for the City and I am delighted that my hon. Friend put that fact on record.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West made clear his reason for the debate. He said it was because of his hatred—I do not think that I use the wrong word—for the City of London as a local authority. I do not approve, but I understand. However, I must remind him that it has survived by virtue of various Royal Commissions. He gave us the pleasure of quoting from paragraph 935 of the Herbert report. It is sad that he did not quote the paragraph before. For the sake of completeness, because I know that he is a rounded person and likes to be complete, I shall quote paragraph 934. It states:

> "It will be seen that we propose that the City of London should remain as a separate entity within its present limits. This is an anomaly but we recommend that this anomaly should continue and we make this recommendation as a definite, not a provisional recommendation."

I shall now deal with the quarantine and animal health facilities at London airport. The question of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West was fair but wholly illogical. The City was doing that work long before the GLC was established. Therefore, the argument that the function should have gone to central Government or elsewhere when the GLC was rightfully abolished does not hold water. It was carefully considered and it was decided that the GLC should not undertake that function. If it was not undertaken by the City, the cost would fall on central Government or the London boroughs. At present it is paid for by the City. There is no Government grant or subsidy. If the hon. Gentleman would like to fight a campaign to charge the London boroughs for carrying out that service and make them pay for it, I do not think that he would be popular with the London Labour party. He certainly would not be popular with the London Labour boroughs. I suggest that he should gulp hard and let sleeping dogs lie.

Under the present legislation byelaws have been placing a difficult and heavy administrative burden upon the Department of the Environment. It recognises it as such

and accordingly has decided that it is not necessary for the Department to confirm any byelaws. Therefore, the change has the consent of the Department.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) gave a long explanation of clause 22 to the House. Therefore, I can be brief, because he has given the salient facts. However, as the House knows, the City saved Epping forest from enclosure in the 19th century. It now maintains it at no expense to the ratepayer or taxpayer. Does the hon. Member for Newham, North-West wish those costs to fall upon the London ratepayers? If he does, which is the logic of his proposal, I shall ensure that that fact is known and added to the other costs that he wants to put on them. I do not think that he will be too popular with his colleagues. Like his predecessor — I say this pleasantly—he may have difficulty in reselection.

Mr. Tony Banks: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will have no difficulty in reselection. In fact, I have already been reselected. However, the national executive of the Labour party has not approved the reselection because of the involvement of black sections. We shall pass quickly over that. I am sure that I will be imposed on the constituency in the end. I would expect to see the charge for Epping forest fall on the ratepayers of Greater London. However, it would be done on a reorganisation that would free all the City cash and assets for use by Greater London as well. Therefore, we would not be depriving ourselves of City cash but using it more generously around the rest of London.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: If the hon. Gentleman deprived the City of its cash, that would be a once-and-for-all operation. The annual revenue costs would be rather like the goose that laid the golden egg. If one whips the goose away, the golden eggs do not last much longer. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is a little illogical.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Presumably, if the city corporation was deprived of the management of Epping forest it might be that the ratepayers of Epping Forest would be asked to contribute. They certainly would not wish to do so.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Had the good burgesses of Newham, North-West known that the hon. Gentleman wanted to put the extra burdens upon them, he might not have been reselected. However, we will leave that point.

The hon. Member for Newham North-West raised a helpful point on the 1991 issue. I shall see that it is looked at. The problems that might come up if there were a vacancy need to be looked at. It will not come into effect until 1991 because, as he rightly summised, there will not be a general election of verderers until then. They have a fixed term. However, the hon. Gentleman is clearly an advocate of fixed terms. There are lengthy needs of publication. When one places notices on trees they may be eaten by wandering cattle, butted by deer and may have to be replaced. Therefore, it takes a certain amount of time.

The Bill is useful and, as has been said, the debate has been interesting and pleasant. It has fully justified the existence of the City because it has proved how the City can do a large number of things at no cost to the ratepayer or taxpayer and that it can provide a remarkably good service. I hope that the House will give the Bill its Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Double Taxation Relief

8.19 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mauritius) Order 1986 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 5th December.

I suggest that it will be for the convenience of the House if we also discuss motion No. 3:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (France) Order 1986 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 5th December.

The House might find it helpful if I begin by saying a few words about double taxation conventions generally before turning to the orders themselves.

The United Kingdom has an extensive network of bilateral double taxation treaties. Their purpose is to give relief from the burden of international double taxation which would otherwise result when income arises in one country, flows to another and is taxed in both.

Broadly speaking, and depending upon the nature of the income and laws of the country concerned, relief is usually provided by the country in which the income arises, reducing its rates of tax, and in some cases giving up the right to tax altogether. In addition, where income remains taxable in both countries, the country in which the recipient is resident will give credit against its tax on that income in respect of the tax paid in the country of source, or will give relief from double taxation by exempting that income from tax in the country of residence.

Double taxation agreements, amongst other things, lay down rules for the taxing of income flowing between the two treaty partners. They also provide rules for taxing a resident of one country who carries on business in the other country.

Another important function of a double taxation agreement is to fix maximum rates of tax that may be applied by the country of source to certain categories of income—for example, dividends, interest and royalties. These rates will remain unaffected by any subsequent increase in domestic tax rates in either country. Double taxation conventions help to create a stable fiscal framework within which international trade and investment can develop to the mutual benefit of the two countries.

We already have comprehensive double taxation conventions with France and Mauritius. The protocol with France adds an entirely new article to the existing provisions, setting out clearly defined rules for taxing certain offshore activities. The protocol with Mauritius amends the existing convention by substituting a new article covering the taxation treatment of dividends. I shall deal with the main provisions of each order in turn, starting with France. This order concerns the taxation of income from offshore oil and gas activities on the continental shelf.

It is generally recognised by countries around the North sea and English channel, and many others, that special rules are needed to take account of the special circumstances arising in offshore exploration and development. France, although having little offshore oil of its own to date, agreed that the terms of the existing convention needed to be modified to take these special considerations into account.

This offshore protocol is not to be confused with another protocol which deals, inter alia, with certain tax matters relating to the Channel fixed link. The terms of this protocol have been agreed in principle, but the final text is still being discussed. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary announced these arrangements on 10 July 1986 in reply to a parliamentary question.

The protocol before us follows the pattern of similar amendments made in recent years to conventions with Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States. Basically, the general rule is that an enterprise of one country carrying on activities relating to mineral exploration or exploitation on the continental shelf of the other country may be taxed in that other country on profits from those activities. Any double taxation is to be relieved by credit in the country of residence. The taxation of profits from the transportation of supplies or personnel, however, follows the normal rules which apply to the taxation of international shipping. These provide for taxation solely in the country of residence of the operator.

This protocol is not essential for the taxation of profits from offshore oil and gas production, which are taxable in the producing country under the normal rules. The reason it is needed is to overcome uncertainties surrounding the tax treatment of the various exploration, service and support activities of contractors engaged by the oil companies, particularly where these activities take place on board, or from, mobile vessels. The provisions of the present convention were not devised with these activities in mind.

The protocol will have effect in the calendar year following that in which it comes into force. It cannot come into force until both countries have notified one another of the completion of their legislative procedures.

I now come to the order with Mauritius. This contains the text of a protocol which amends the existing dividends article in the convention. The 1984 Mauritian Finance Act introduced substantial changes to the taxation of company profits and dividends. An unintended consequence was that the provisions of the dividend article of the existing convention effectively prevented Mauritius from charging tax on dividends flowing to the United Kingdom. Mauritius requested an amendment to the existing convention so that their taxing rights could be restored.

In the new dividend article, Mauritius has agreed to rates of tax which are not excessive and which compare favourably with those contained in broadly similar agreements that the United Kingdom has with other developing countries. The rate for direct investors is 10 per cent. — that is, where the beneficial owner of the dividends is a company controlling at least 10 per cent. of the voting power of the company paying the dividends. In all other cases, Mauritius will be able to apply a rate not exceeding 15 per cent. of the gross amount of the dividends.

The protocol will have effect in relation to dividends paid on or after 1 July 1986. In practice, this means that dividends paid to a United Kingdom resident would be taxed in Mauritius only from the year of assessment beginning 1 July 1987. Mauritius has forgone its taxing rights on dividends flowing to the United Kingdom until the protocol takes effect.

I commend these two draft orders to the House on the basis that they strike a fair balance between the interests of the various countries concerned and the United

Kingdom, and, indeed, between the interests of the residents of those countries and those of the United Kingdom. I shall be happy to deal, so far as I can, with any points on them which may concern hon. Members. Subject to that, I hope that the House will approve the two orders.

8.24 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): The purpose of the double taxation conventions is to ensure, first, that there is no double taxation of an unfair nature, and, secondly, that there are no opportunities for fiscal evasion.

I shall deal first with the order in relation to France. The order inserts effectively a new article in the convention of 1968. I can be brief in dealing with it, but there are one or two minor points that I should like cleared up.

The new article 29A does a number of different things. First, in paragraph 1, it ensures that where an enterprise of one country conducts offshore activities under the jurisdiction of the other, it is deemed to be carrying on business through a permanent establishment in that other country. The effect would be that if a United Kingdom company were conducting offshore oil exploration in French territory it would be liable for tax in France.

I want to make sure that the effect of the new article 29A, taken in conjunction with the articles that already exist, will ensure that there is double taxation relief for the liability to French tax of that United Kingdom company. The effect of article 29A will be that the United Kingdom company exploring on French territory is treated as liable for tax in France. Presumably, under the other articles of the convention, relief is given for any double taxation element.

Secondly, paragraph 3 of the new article 29A provides that independent professional activities carried on in connection with the oil or gas exploration or exploitation in the other contracting state is deemed to be performed from a fixed base in the country where those activities are carried on. In other words, it is similar to offshore activities in connection wth oil or gas exploration. I assume that, for example, canteen facilities on a French oil rig provided by a United Kingdom company would be liable for French tax.

As the Minister said, the exception arises in circumstances where profits are derived from the transportation of supplies or personnel. That follows the normal rules of international shipping and they are taxable only in the state in which the taxpayer is resident. I assume that a United Kingdom helicopter company transporting personnel to a French oil rig is still taxed as a United Kingdom resident. I simply wanted confirmation that I have understood the effect of the order relating to France.

The protocol in the order relating to Mauritius amends the 1987 convention with Mauritius on double taxation. As the Minister said, it follows changes in the law of Mauritius on the taxation and distribution of company profits and distributions. Therefore, in principle, since it involves changes in the law, or is consequent upon changes in the law of Mauritius, I assume that, in principle, the treatment of dividends flowing from a United Kingdom company to a Mauritius resident or shareholder is unchanged.

As I understand it, at present, dividends coming from a United Kingdom company to a Mauritius resident or shareholder will be taxed in Mauritius. The Mauritius resident is entitled to a tax credit in the United Kingdom. But where he is entitled to a tax credit, he is also taxable in the United Kingdom on the aggregate of the dividends and the tax credit, but at a rate not exceeding 15 per cent.

I notice one slight change. To be entitled to a tax credit in the United Kingdom, the Mauritius resident under the new article 10 must, in order to be entitled to a tax credit in the United Kingdom, be

"the beneficial owner of the dividend",

whereas previously I think that the words were

"subject to tax in Mauritius".

I assume that that is merely a technical change and has no significance.

The main item in the order relating to Mauritius is the change in the treatment of dividends coming to United Kingdom residents from a Mauritius company. I have one point that I should like the Minister to elucidate because I have not entirely understood the effect of the order. As I understand it, previously, under the old paragraph 4 of article 10, for which the order substitutes a new paragraph, where a United Kingdom shareholder received a dividend from a Mauritius company and corporation tax was charged in Mauritius, the dividend would be taxed in the United Kingdom, but there would be no tax on the dividend in Mauritius. What has happened now is that the United Kingdom shareholder who receives a dividend from a Mauritius company will be taxed in the United Kingdom, but also in Mauritius—up to 10 per cent., if the United Kingdom shareholder is a controlling company of more than 10 per cent. of the voting power of the Mauritius company, or otherwise up to 15 per cent.

This is important in case there are any consequences to United Kingdom residents. I rather assumed that Mauritius might previously have applied a sort of classical system of taxation and dividends would be distributed on the after-tax profits of the Mauritian company, and had changed to some sort of imputation system so that dividends were distributed through the pre-tax profits, as with our advance corporation tax, and that that was why it was necessary to introduce an ability to tax dividends in the United Kingdom and in Mauritius. If I am wrong about that, perhaps I could be told.

In general terms, can the Minister tell us what the implication will be for United Kingdom residents? Has he any financial estimate of the order's implications? Will the United Kingdom's revenue be adversely affected? The same applies to the order relating to France. Can the Minister tell us in general terms what the revenue implications will be? Will they be adverse for the United Kingdom tax holder?

I am aware that these are complicated measures. I do not need to detain the House further, but since the orders are before us I thought it right to raise these queries.

8.34 pm

Mr. Brooke: With the leave of the House, I shall be delighted to respond to the questions of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The hon. Gentleman asked about double taxation relief on the French order. I can give him a complete assurance that there will be no change in the relief available against United Kingdom tax on the same income under article 24 of the convention. Similarly, in the hon. Gentleman's example of a United Kingdom company transporting personnel to a French oil or gas rig, I can confirm that that would be taxable in the United Kingdom along the lines that he suggested.

[Mr. Brooke]

On the Mauritian order, the hon. Gentleman made a correct assumption about the situation before 1984. The Mauritian element has come in because, as I said, of the changes that Mauritius made to its domestic tax law in 1984 when, inadvertently, it precluded itself from taxing dividends that were flowing to the United Kingdom.

Before the changes that were made in 1984, dividends were allowable as deductions in computing a company's chargeable profits, and were treated as taxable income in the hands of the shareholders — whether or not such persons were residents. Rates of Mauritian tax have varied, but at the time of the change a public company was taxed at a rate of 50 per cent. and a private company at a rate of 60 per cent. In addition, a surcharge of 10 per cent. of the tax payable was also imposed, making the effective rates 55 per cent. and 66 per cent. respectively. Individuals were taxed progressively, and in some years the maximum rate was as high as 80 per cent. The terms of the existing convention allowed Mauritius to apply its domestic rates without restriction. Since 1984, dividends have not been treated as allowable deductions. There is no provision for withholding tax when dividends are paid, and so dividends are taxed like any other income, but where a non-resident company derives dividends from a resident company, Mauritian tax is payable by the shareholding company at a rate of 35 per cent. Where a shareholder is an individual, tax is applied on a progressive scale, ranging from 5 per cent. to 35 per cent.

I do not want to go through an elaborate arithmetical calculation but, before the 1984 changes, a subsidiary of a United Kingdom company in Mauritius, which wished to remit profits entirely as a dividend, would have nil taxable profits in Mauritius. The Mauritius income in the United Kingdom was charged so that in total the dividend after Mauritius tax was 45 per cent. of the original profit of, say, 100. In the United Kingdom the foreign dividend of 100 was charged at 50 per cent., according to United Kingdom tax law in 1983.

There was a further overseas tax of 55, of which 5 was unrelieved because of the Mauritian tax of 55 per cent. Therefore, the United Kingdom tax payable was nil. Under the post-1984 changes under the convention, as amended by this protocol, the subsidiary of the United Kingdom company in Mauritius will have a Mauritian income of 65, after the deduction of 35 of Mauritian tax. But there will then be a Mauritian tax at the treaty rate of 10 per cent. Therefore, there will be a further 6·5 per cent. of tax, producing a net income of 58·5 per cent.

In the United Kingdom the foreign dividend would be grossed up for underlying relief. If one assumes a United Kingdom tax of 35 per cent., the overseas tax on the dividend will be 6·5, as I described a moment ago, and the tax on the profits will be 35. Of the overseas tax, 5 was unrelieved because of the Mauritian tax of 55 that I have described. Whereas we previously had an unrelieved figure of 5 per cent., we now have an unrelieved figure of 6·5 per cent. Again, no United Kingdom tax will be payable. Those are complicated figures and I shall not take the House through what would have happened if we had not amended them. It will be clear to the House that the changes are not of great significance but they are helpful to Mauritius. The flow of finance between Mauritius and the United Kingdom is traditionally confidential, but we are not talking about large sums of money.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mauritius) Order 1986 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 5th December.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (France) Order 1986 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 5th December.—*[Mr. Brooke.]*

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING

Ordered,

That the provisions of pargraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees), and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft Amendments of the Potato Marketing Scheme 1955, as amended, as if they were a draft Statutory Instrument; and that the said draft Amendments be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

Talbot Green, Mid Glamorgan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

8.41 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): I rarely take advantage of this procedure, but I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House on an issue which has caused a great deal of local anxiety. It would be of assistance to the House if I explained the position of Talbot Green. It is situated at the mouth of the Ely valley and has been growing commercially and residentially. Many of its inhabitants travel to work to Bridgend in the west, to Pontypridd in the east, to Tonyrefail and the Rhondda in the north or, most likely, to Cardiff in the south. Because of the town's position at a junction, a large volume of through traffic uses the main roads.

The growth of the town as a residential and commercial centre is evidenced by the development there of the Newpark site. On this enclosed site has been placed a Tesco superstore and petrol filling station, a shopping precinct which is attached to the Tesco store with a precinct of smaller shops, and a CRS furniture superstore. These stores have their own car parks catering for about 500 to 600 cars with an average occupancy per day of about 400 to 500 cars. Houses have been built on the site, sheltered accommodation has been provided and there is a John Groom Association home which, as all Members will know, is a home for quite severely disabled people.

There is one access to the site from the A473 and one main egress on to the A4119. Elsewhere in the township of Talbot Green there are a large number of other stores and a bus station which carries passengers along the main routes of travel. It is quite clear that such a busy township will have a certain amount of traffic congestion anyway, and to that congestion has been added an open air market which by a typical error in the inspector's report is described as being at Pontyclun. That open air market operates on the south-west side of Talbot Green and in recent years has added considerably to the traffic congestion.

The market is in itself controversial, but what is beyond controversy is that it attracts customers in numbers which overwhelm its car parking facilities and the on-street car parking facilities in the immediate vicinity. On its own that market generates an extensive amount of pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the area.

To this already volatile situation has been added a proposal to establish a second market on the Newpark site about half a mile from the existing market. Very properly, the local authority rejected that proposal on planning grounds, but the appeal against the rejection was allowed by the Welsh Office inspector. To put it mildly, his decision caused consternation, anger and outrage. It seems to the people there to be explicable only as an abandonment by the Welsh Office of its duty to help secure a balanced community and it is seen as an abandonment of the residents.

I shall try to explain just how bad the Welsh Office decision was. The inquiry was defective both in the procedure followed for its convening and in the conclusions to be found in the report. The procedural defects were unfair to the public. People in the area immediately affected should have been given five days' notice of the hearing, but no one that I have spoken to had that. A very few had two days' notice but the vast majority of people living on the site had no notice at all.

None of the residents of Green park, Maestrisant, Llys Illtyd, Oak road, Ash walk or Cherry Tree walk was informed. Therefore, they had no chance to put in written submissions, and when one or two of them discovered the existence of the inquiry and attended and asked to be allowed to give oral evidence, they received a dusty reply from the inspector. Having thus excluded almost all the residents likely to be directly affected, the inspector arrived at wrong conclusions. That is not a mere matter of opinion, because there were errors on the face of the report and subsequent events have shown other errors in findings.

The inspector was rightly concerned about traffic congestion and traffic flows. His theoretical calculations are impressive, but, as the late Aneurin Bevan said, why should we look in a crystal ball when we can read the book. If my constituents had been given the opportunity to give evidence, such academic calculations would have been unnecessary. If the inspector had heard from the lady who telephoned me the other Saturday to tell me that because of street parking associated with the existing market it had taken her half an hour to cover the one mile between her home and her shop in Pontyclun, he would have known that. If he had read the letter from another lady who now must allow 20 minutes extra for her journey to Tonyrefail on a Wednesday to get to work and is often late, he would have realised that and would know that, whatever the theoretical pattern of traffic, in practice traffic dislocation in this township is now very great.

I appreciate that the Minister may well respond to that by saying that it is not too bad because the inspector has taken care to prevent the two markets from opening on the same day. In paragraph 12 of his report the inspector rules out the new market opening on a Saturday because the present one is open on that day. He describes dual opening as unacceptable and grants to the new market the opening days of Wednesday and Thursday. What he did not know or knew but overlooked is that, though the existing Yemms market then opened only on a Saturday, it had the power, if it chose to use it, to open on another day of the week. Since the report appeared it has, surprise, surprise, chosen to open on a Wednesday, and that is the reason for the extra time that my constituent must now allow to get to work.

If the dislocation that I have described arises when one market opens on Wednesdays, it will also apply when the new market is open on Thursdays and will be double when, as is now permitted, the two markets are simultaneously open on Wednesdays. Can the House imagine the chaos, the misery and the frustration that will occur when both open air markets are decanting their customers on to the same roads on the same day and mostly at the same peak times?

A market or markets will now be held on three days of the week and life in Talbot Green will be significantly dislocated. The effect of the ignorance or the oversight of the inspector in this vital matter renders his calculations largely valueless. His report is thereby fatally flawed. In paragraph 12 the inspector says that the existing market is to provide additional car parking, as he describes it, "to ease traffic problems". For a variety of reasons, that has not proved to be the case since the hearing. Indeed, less car

[Mr. Brynmor John]

parking is now available than when the inquiry was held. That is another point on which the inspector's report is wrong.

None of the parties to the inquiry could have foreseen another flaw. The appellant asserted, and it appeared to play a part in the inspector's decision, that the imminent construction of the Talbot Green bypass would halve traffic congestion in the village. Last week put paid to that assertion. The Welsh Office withdrew its grant of £8·5 million for the first year of construction of the new bypass. Also it asked whether it was necessary to build the bypass as the railway line was to be closed. Quite apart from the planning decision, that is a major blow to this area. It is a recipe for chaos. Once again, subsequent events have illustrated the unsoundness of the inspector's report.

The major argument is not about convenience but about danger to life and health. I was born in the town that I now represent. It has had an open air market since at least the 19th century. It is enshrined in an Act of Parliament. This is not the cry, therefore, of somebody who is unused to open air markets. I am thoroughly used to them. However, it cannot be denied that open air markets in villages result in people parking in the surrounding streets, often on both sides, even though car parking is provided.

The greater traffic flow into and out of the Newpark site for the new market means that the emergency services would be faced with a desperate problem if there were a fire on the site, or if somebody were taken seriously ill. Such incidents are even more likely where sheltered accommodation is provided. Indeed, incidents of that kind are highly likely at places like the John Groom home. There are far more emergencies to be dealt with, and the physical immobility of the residents means that they are vulnerable if there is a fire. Can it honestly be said that the inquiry took these factors into account? It contains no reference to the problem. It is a glaring omission in what I hope the Minister will agree is an unsatisfactory report.

Any planning authority, including the Welsh Office, must pay regard to shoppers' preferences. It has an equal duty to pay regard to the preferences of the residents. It must strike a balance between shops that open on six days a week and provide services as well as goods and those which operate on only one or two days a week and who can close at short notice. If the trading activities of the shops that open six days a week are weakened, the community is weakened. That is doubly the case when a market has a maximum life of only four years.

The inspector — an outsider and, because of procedural flaws, without knowledge of the views of local people — said that in his view the market would not weaken local traders. He could not have held that view for a moment if he had heard what local traders say. The existing market has hit trade hard on precisely the day when traders hope to do well. They will now be hard hit on two days when they hope to do well, but they will be particularly hard hit on Saturdays. Two markets would force some traders to close, while others would have to cut back.

Who would replace those traders? To whom could the local authority look for lost rating income? Who would serve the population on Mondays and Tuesdays when trade is as much a public as a commercial service? The decision to allow a second market, even for a limited period, would impose an intolerable strain on the community. It is the worst of decisions. The local community has not been adequately represented. The decision was based on grounds that were either wrong at the time or falsified by subsequent developments.

In the case of opencast mining in his constituency the Secretary of State has shown that he will not allow mere commercial considerations to despoil an area. What is good enough for Pembrokeshire is good enough for Talbot Green. A fresh look at this question and at the protection that my constituents feel has been denied to them so far should now be undertaken by the Welsh Office.

8.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): Individual local planning applications and the decisions made on them often give rise to concern on the part of interested parties, and I fully understand the wish of the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) to seek to raise in the House tonight the subject of recent planning decisions on Talbot Green in Mid Glamorgan which are of concern to his constituents. It is perhaps best to start by explaining to the House the background to the planning appeal that is at the centre of the issues which the hon. Gentleman has raised in the course of his speech.

In December 1984 Excrest Ltd. applied to Taff Ely borough council, as local planning authority, for planning permission to use an area of land at Newpark, Talbot Green, Llantrisant for two days per week as an open-air market with 80 pitches.

In a letter accompanying the application, the applicant's agent noted that the land was owned by the borough council, which had agreed to let it to Excrest, subject to planning permission being obtained. It was later explained that there was space for 220 cars to be packed, with an access point from the entry road to the district shopping centre, which includes a large Tesco supermarket. The application did not say on which two days of the week the market would open — this would be decided later.

The local planning authority then consulted various bodies about the proposal. They received a direction of refusal from the Mid Glamorgan county engineer and surveyor in the following terms:

"The development would result in a material increase in the volume of traffic entering routes A473 and A4119 and leaving route A473 and be detrimental to the safety and free flow of traffic using the aforementioned classified highways."

Those familiar with the area will know that the application and the later appeal relate to an island site surrounded by the two main roads mentioned by the county engineer and the internal road serving the district shopping centre. In response to public notices, a large number of local residents wrote to the borough council expressing their opposition to the proposal. Some of them submitted a petition. Objections also came from the Tesco and Homeworld stores, which felt that very severe traffic and parking problems could occur if the permission were granted.

After due deliberation, the borough council decided to refuse permission. The notice of refusal, which was issued on 15 April 1985, contained four reasons, the first of which gave effect to the county engineer's direction. The second and third reasons, also suggested by the county engineer,

related to lack of adequate car parking and possible danger to pedestrians. The final reason given was that the proposal was considered to be detrimental to the residential amenities of occupiers living in the vicinity of the site.

On 29 July 1985, the applicant appealed to the Secretary of State and indicated that it wished to exercise its right to be heard by a planning inspector. On a point of procedure, I should explain that, generally speaking, appeals against a refusal of planning permission are prescribed by regulations for determination by an inspector. My right hon. Friend, of course, has the power to direct that a planning appeal should be determined by him rather than by an inspector, but that power is used sparingly, where for instance, the proposal is for significant development or development of at least regional or national importance. This appeal was not considered to come within any other criteria for recovering jurisdiction over an appeal and so it was left to an inspector to determine. The decision in such cases is the inspector's alone.

Agreement was reached between the parties in November 1985 that a local inquiry into the appeal would be held in Pontypridd, commencing on 18 March 1986, the earliest date convenient to everyone. A Welsh Office letter to the borough council enclosed a copy of a notice of the inquiry and asked the council to give information about it to owners and occupiers of nearby property and to others who were considered by the council to be affected by the proposed development. The letter also indicated the Department's view that the press should normally be notified of local inquiries. I have no reason to believe that the council did not act accordingly. Indeed, correspondence received at this time indicated that the appeal was adequately advertised in accordance with standard procedure.

The inquiry opened as arranged on 18 March 1986. It was resumed on 24 and 25 April and again on 8 and 9 May. A great many documents were submitted to the inspector, including a letter from the hon. Member for Pontypridd, dated 17 December 1985. I have already given the hon. Gentleman a specific assurance in correspondence that this letter was taken into account by the inspector in arriving at his decision, and I am happy to repeat that assurance now. Indeed the letter, although not specifically listed, is contained in the bundle of documents numbered 16 by the inspector in his list of documentary evidence.

One of the matters raised in that letter was the special attention that should be paid to the needs of disabled people living at the Maestrisant home — the John Groom complex to which the hon. Gentleman has referred — a point which the hon. Gentleman came back to in his letter of 10 September 1986. In that letter, he said that he did not believe that this matter

"was at all properly conducted and considered at the Inquiry".

While I accept that it was not specifically referred to in the council's refusal notice or in the decision letter of the inspector, the inspector was aware of the home's existence, and had regard to it in arriving at his decision. Reference to it is contained in the documents of evidence which are part of the public record and it is, of course, covered by the general reference to concern expressed by local residents in paragraphs 9 and 20 of the inspector's letter.

The hon. Gentleman made a further point in his second letter relating to the absence of any comment from the police authority about the application. As I said to the hon. Gentleman in my letter of 6 November last, it is entirely for the local planning authority to decide who needs to be consulted at the application stage. Official advice about the display of site notices and the scope for consultation was given in Welsh Office circular 134/73, which has stood the test of time and is still Government policy. If the police authority was not aware of the application for an open-air market, I can only suggest again that the hon. Gentleman should approach the borough council for an explanation.

At the appeal stage, a site notice was displayed and all the standard procedures were followed. As I said earlier, the council was reminded that the press should normally be notified of the arrangements for holding local inquiries. Certainly, I note that there were reporters present from two local newspapers. The inquiry was adjourned twice and, in accordance with the rules governing procedures to be followed at inquiries, the details of the reopening date and venue were announced by the inspector before each adjournment. In view of this, and the fact that the inquiry lasted for five days spread over a long period, I find it difficult to understand the suggestion that local people were not aware of it. With all this in mind, I find it hard to accept the hon. Gentleman's contention that people did not have an adequate opportunity to give evidence to the inspector.

Another point which the hon. Gentleman made was that another market operator had decided to hold his market on a Wednesday, one of the days mentioned in the permission given to Excrest. That decision by the market operator in question, who was not party to the appeal, has no bearing on the planning merits of the matter we are considering tonight, as the observations of the inspector in this or any other case do not, of course, bind persons not a party to the applications.

Mr. John: I apologise for interrupting; I realise that this is an Adjournment debate. That is not the point that I was making. The point I made was that the inspector specifically took account of the unwisdom of having two open-air markets on the same day and thought that he had avoided it. It now turns out that on one of the two days for which he gave permission another market is already open, so we will have the very thing that he counselled against.

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will realise that inspectors hearing appeals can deal only with situations as they find them at the time. If circumstances change afterwards, that is not a matter that can lead to a reopening of an appeal decision.

I turn now to the inspector's decision on 22 July 1986. As far as procedures are concerned, I have carefully considered the hon. Gentleman's remarks but I am not satisfied that there is any reason to alter the view I expressed during Question Time in the House on 8 December in response to his supplementary question, which is that I am not aware of any shortcomings in the procedures which were followed in this case.

The inspector's decision to grant planning permission for the use of this land as an open-air market for a period of four years was one for him alone to take, on the merits of the particular case. Planning legislation provides that an inspector must have regard to

"the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations."

[Mr. Robinson]

He must, of course, give reasons for each decision. The expression "material consideration" brings me to the question of planning policies—which are for the most part to be found in departmental circulars—and their relevance to the Excrest appeal.

I do not propose to read out all of the reasons given by the inspector in his letter of 22 July last. That letter is a public document which has been made freely available and it has to be left to speak for itself. Any impartial observer reading the letter would, I believe, be impressed with the thorough way in which the inspector approached his task. It is apparent from the second paragraph of the decision letter that the question of access and traffic conditions at Talbot Green was one of the primary concerns of the inspector. He considered that one of the main issues was whether the additional vehicular and pedestrian traffic movements likely to be generated by the proposed open-air market would have so serious an impact on the existing traffic conditions as to warrant a refusal of planning permission.

After weighing all the evidence on traffic and highway matters and observing the traffic flows at the site on the five days during which the inquiry was held, he formed the opinion that any increase in traffic congestion during the morning and evening peak flow periods at Talbot Green roundabout would be most undesirable and would not be in the best interests of the local community and road users. He referred to the traffic circulation pattern on the Newpark housing estate in which a home for the elderly is situated, and to the fact that the estate is served by a one-way traffic system in from the A473 Talbot road and out on to the A4119 highway. The question of access for emergency service vehicles was raised at the inquiry by both written and oral submission for consideration by the inspector in reaching his decision.

The inspector reached his conclusion that if market trading is restricted to between the hours of 9 am and 4 pm, and was permitted only on Wednesday and Thursdays, it would not generate customer traffic that would significantly intensify the traffic problems that occurred during the peak hour flows at the Talbot Green roundabout.

I note that there is concern about the risk of cars parking on both sides of the road but it will be seen from paragraph 5 of the inspector's decision letter that a car park for 100 cars is proposed for market customers and that the whole of the field adjoining the proposed market stall area could be used, if required, to cater for around 220 car spaces. The use of the field for non-operational car parking has been reserved by condition No. 9 of the planning consent.

These, then, were the inspector's conclusions on the operational aspects of the proposed development. He also dealt at some length with the implications of local and national policies. There is no time for me to go into all of these but I would draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to Welsh Office circular 38/85, which emphasises that there is always a presumption in favour of allowing applications for development, having regard to all material considerations, unless that development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. In the last analysis, each decision involves a balancing act, setting one argument against another and trying to arrive at a fair decision.

During his speech the hon. Gentleman referred to the proposed Talbot Green bypass. I think it would be helpful if I make it clear that the Welsh Office has not reached a decision about the principle and merits of the proposal. I assure him that it will be considered for grant along with other schemes in Wales if Mid Glamorgan county council include it, as I believe it intends to, in its bid for transport supplementary grant for 1988-89.

The hon. Gentleman has, of course, received a copy of the inspector's decision. With that letter the parties received a leaflet explaining the procedure for challenging the decision in the High Court on a point of law. The period of six weeks within which such a challenge has to be made has long expired. As I have already explained in correspondence, once a decision on an appeal has been made, neither the Secretary of State nor his inspector has any further jurisdiction.

I have done my best in this debate to cover all the detailed points which the hon. Gentleman has gone to some trouble to raise in his remarks. I appreciate that my response does not meet his wishes but I must emphasise that this is essentially a local matter which an inspector was perfectly competent to deal with, and that even after listening very carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech as I have done this evening, I see no justification for questioning either the inspector's judgment or his handling of the inquiry. Certainly there is no question of re-opening the inquiry or of taking action to revoke the decision.

Drugs (Wales)

9.9 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I welcome the opportunity of this Adjournment debate to discuss the drugs crisis and particularly its Welsh dimension, a crisis which the Select Committee on Home Affairs has rightly described as "the most serious peace-time threat to our national well being."

The number of drug addicts registered with the Home Office is currently rising at the rate of 25 per cent. a year, and the figure currently stands at more than 9,000. In north Wales in 1978 there were 292 offences relating to drugs, none of which involved heroin. In 1984 there were 956 such offences, half of which involved heroin.

Even the Home Office admits that the figures for registered addicts must be multiplied by five to give an accurate and real picture. Others working in the field go as far as to claim that the figures must be mutliplied by a factor of 10 to get close to the mark. Mr. Dave Turner, the co-ordinator of the Standing Committee on Drug Abuse, estimates the total to be between 60,000 and 70,000.

The serious problem in north Wales is worsened by the fact that the heroin epidemic has raged for five years in the Wirral area, adjacent to my constituency. The heroin problem there is second only to that in Glasgow and it is three times worse than the average for a United Kingdom borough.

In Birkenhead—known locally as "smack city"—a quarter of 16 to 24-year-olds have some involvement with heroin, with "chasing the dragon". Other areas in Merseyside may be as little as 18 months behind the Wirral and parts of north Wales not far behind that.

The scale of the problem is also revealed by the record number of 30,500 drug seizures by Customs and police in 1985. That figure was 8 per cent. higher than the 1984 figure, which, in its turn, was 9 per cent. up on the 1983 figure. However, and this is an extremely important point, the continuing low price and high quality of heroin shows that the available supply on the street has not been dented to any considerable extent. The rule of thumb is that for every seizure nine go undetected. The incentive for traffickers is huge in spite of the passing in the last Session of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986.

A kilo of cocaine worth £5,000 in Bolivia is worth as much as £180,000 on the streets of the United Kingdom. As if the situation is not already serious enough, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office has warned of the new threat approaching our islands, namely, the threat of cocaine. The lucrative American market for that drug is already reaching saturation point. The danger of cocaine is multiplied many fold through the use of "crack", the cheaper, more immediately powerful and more addictive form of pure cocaine.

The drugs problem cannot be narrowly defined. It affects many Whitehall Departments: the Home Office, with its responsibility for the police, the Treasury, with its responsibility for Customs, the Department of Health and Social Security, with its responsibility for treatment, and the Department of Education and Science, with its responsibility for education. Of course, in addition, it affects the two territorial Departments, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office.

Two years ago the ministerial group on the misuse of drugs was set up to co-ordinate Government strategy and action. That was an eminently wise decision. The Government have taken strong action to deal with the two dimensions of the problem, supply and demand. I pay tribute to the Government for their efforts to stem the supply of drugs into this country through their contribution of £3·4 million to the United Nations scheme aimed at the eradication of opium in Pakistan and its contribution of £1·5 million to reduce coca production in South America. Although there has been a sharp fall in the amount of heroin coming from Pakistan, large quantities are still coming through India.

After the eradication at source, the second block is at our borders, first through the Customs and Excise. The Government have acted here—although they have come in for much unjustified criticism. The number of customs officers whose main priority is drug detection will by April this year be 500 up on the April 1985 figure. The number of specialist intelligence investigators in the same period will have risen from 121 to 297.

Last year, we saw the clear success of the Government's actions with the breaking up of more than 80 trafficking gangs, most recently and perhaps most dramatically, with Operation Fulman, which broke up the Dye drug ring.

But despite the increase in customs officers, heroin is still coming in in large quantities, mainly through freight imports rather than personal luggage, and that makes it particularly difficult to detect. Organised crime syndicates are estimated to be making more than £500 million a year from drug trafficking. With the cocaine threat looming, the Government will have to consider putting more resources into the customs service. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office has given reassurances that he is keeping a close watch on the number of customs officers and will not hesitate to decide to increase them if necessary.

The block at our borders depends not only on customs but on the police. There are only 60 on the drugs wing within the regional crime squad covering the whole of the north-west and only 10 covering North Wales. In London, where half of the country's hard drug problems are concentrated, there are only 57 officers specialising in drug offences, although that is 19 up on the 1985 total. More resources are needed. This would be an investment in the health of the nation, and we would do well to follow the example of the President of the United States and his anti-abuse programme.

A further way to try to stem the supply of drugs is through deterrence. In the Session before last I was able to steer through the House the Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Act as a private Member's measure. It was supported by all parties, indeed by all factions within parties, including hon. Members from the Militants to the moderates in the Labour Party and from the arid dries to the saturated Wets in our party. It had universal support. That measure increased the maximum sentence for trafficking in hard drugs from 14 years to life. That was followed in the last Session by the Drug Trafficking Offences Act, which will enable the confiscation of assets of those convicted of drug trafficking.

The effectiveness of that measure in the face of the sophistication and professionalism of the criminals trafficking in drugs, particularly in the laundering of the assets of their evil trade, depends on international co-operation. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office emphasised that point when he chaired the meeting of Community Ministers on drugs misuse on

[Mr. Keith Raffan]

20 October 1986. I believe that there is a need for international co-operation beyond the confines of Europe, and I look forward to further progress on a United Nations convention.

I have discussed in some detail past efforts and current measures by the Government to stem the supply of hard drugs, but we have to face the fact that they are still coming into the country in large quantities. The Government are also rightly trying to remove demand—this is the second dimension, after supply—and to dissuade young people from experimenting with drugs through their advertising campaign. Some £2 million was spent in 1985 on anti-heroin publicity and a further £2 million is being spent in the current financial year on the second phase of that campagn, aimed particularly at parents. I know that £200,000 of that campaign publicity money has been devoted specifically to Wales. Market research shows that the campaign is being successful. Before the campaign was started, 83 per cent. of youngsters said that they would reject an offer of heroin and now that has risen by 10 per cent. to 93 per cent.

All this is encouraging, but there is still a need for more localised advertising campaigns. Professor Geoffrey Pearson, the professor of social work at Middlesex polytechnic, has compiled a report on drugs in the north of England, and he has questioned whether "a blanket advertising campaign" is the best way to deal with the problem. He feels that the Government's campaign should be more geared to local needs, and this has been endorsed by Dr. Howard Parker of Liverpool university, following his work in the Wirral area. I believe that there is room for a distinctly Welsh initiative to put us in the vanguard of education on drug misuse.

During the debate on AIDS on 21 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services announced the strengthening of the Health Education Council by reconstituting it as a special health authority with increased resources. This special authority will assume the current responsibilities of the Health Education Council and will be given the major executive responsibility for public education on AIDS. It will be an integral part of the National Health Service within England.

During that debate my right hon. Friend said that the exact relationship of the new agency to health education arrangements in Wales had yet to be settled and he indicated that arrangements may vary in different parts of the United Kingdom. This gives us a great opportunity. The increased resources, the flexibility of the new health education arrangements and the tragic connection between the injection of drugs and AIDS gives us the opportunity, which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will take, for further health education measures on drug misuse in Wales.

Such an initiative should start in our schools with formalised drug education classes on the harmful effects of drug misuse and on the techniques of resisting what is called "peer pressure"—the pressure from older pupils who say to younger ones, "Come on, try it." That initiative must involve teachers, parent-teacher associations and the police.

I believe that it is worth looking at the example of the United States Department of Education's campaign, "What works: schools without drugs".

In the United States, 72 per cent. of primary and secondary pupils now receive some sort of drugs education. One of the more comprehensive programmes is DARE, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, which was begun in Los Angeles three years ago and has since been copied in 62 school districts in the United States. The programme allows for police officers to go into schools on a regular basis for a period of 45 minutes to one hour. They go into a class, with the teacher still there, perhaps up to 17 or 18 times in the academic year.

The education programme must be central to any attack on drug misuse. As Tom Adams, the national director of the "Just Say No" programme in the United States, has put it:

"The kids under 10 in the States are the only group in which non-use of drugs and alcohol and tobacco is the norm."

We, too, in Britain, must grasp the opportunity to keep that age group free of drugs as they enter the temptation-ridden teens.

When dissuasion and prevention tragically fail, we have to fall back on treatment and rehabilitation. An extra £5 million has been allocated by the DHSS to health authorities in England from 1986 to expand the treatment of drug misuse. That is on top of the £17 million already available for local projects such as telephone help lines and counselling services.

I hope that when the Minister replies he can give the comparable figures for Wales. I must confess to being unhappy about the way in which the Government are funding treatment and rehabilitation in Wales at present. In England and Scotland, short-term pump-priming funds have been established, but not in Wales. Instead, the Welsh Office has extended the scope of existing funds for developments in mental health care provided through the NHS to embrace schemes to combat misuse of drugs.

That has aroused the suspicion of health authorities that it is not new money which is being made available but diverted money. I know that the Government have taken the extra scope into consideration and increased the fund from £1 million to £1·5 million, but only £215,000 of that has been specifically allocated for drug misuse. In 1985 in England and Scotland the figures were significantly higher—£6 million and £2 million respectively.

I agree strongly with the Government that primary responsibility for the provision and development of treatment and rehabilitation services must remain at local level. Health authorities will be willing to develop such services if they are given central funding, but they are less willing, almost unwilling, to give priority to combating drug misuse in competition with other local priorities. The Welsh Office should reconsider the funding of drug treatment within the Principality.

In conclusion, William Jones once said:

"The deadliest enemies of nations are not their foreign foes; they always dwell within their own borders."

Drug misuse is the most insidious, all-pervasive, of enemies. It knows no boundaries of class or geography. It is no longer an inner city, a city, an urban, or even a suburban problem; it is prevalent throughout our villages and countryside.

As Brian Arbery, chief executive of the charity Turning Point which runs the Hungerford drug project, says:

"The current Government has done far more than any other in giving money and high priority to dealing with drug abuse".

This debate follows on from yesterday afternoon's debate and it is worth pointing out, sadly in the absence of any

Opposition Members, that the Government have once again been in the vanguard of dealing with this national crisis, just as they have been in the vanguard of helping old-age pensioners in the severely cold weather that we have experienced of late. That has already proved that this Government is a caring Government.

Sadly — the Minister may agree with me — the Government sometimes fall short on presentation of what they are doing. That is an understandable mistake because we are doing so much, but we must broadcast what we have done even more. I hope that I can count on the Minister's support in doing that, particularly in the Principality. If we can get the message across, we shall show, as Lord Woolton once said of another Conservative Government: "We not only cope; we care." I know that the Minister may follow that last point in his opening sentence, but I hope that he will also acknowledge, perhaps as a conditional clause of that opening sentence, that he recognises, as I recognise, that if we are to defeat this deadliest of enemies still more must be done.

9.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) has called this debate tonight. He has gone to considerable lengths and trouble to address the House and to draw attention to an important subject. I particularly welcome the initiative because I share his and the public's concern that new threats to public health do not deflect our determination to defeat the racketeers and pushers.

At the same time, we must do all in our power to help those suffering from drug misuse and those who are in danger of being ensnared by it. That resolve remains undiminished in Wales, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. The effort that forms part of the overall strategy that is not within my departmental responsibilities is nevertheless of direct benefit to Wales, particularly in reducing supplies and thereby protecting our people from its evils.

My hon. Friend referred to the work of the inter-ministerial group on the misuse of drugs under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office. I serve on that group and its work is challenging and extremely important. The work we do in Wales is in the context of the overall strategy co-ordinated by my hon. Friend and I am closely involved in it. There is a comprehensive and developing Government strategy aimed at reducing supplies, improving international action against traffickers, stepping up deterrence, improving the security of illicit drugs and assisting prevention and treatment.

The Welsh Office's place in that relates to health education, treatment, rehabilitation and the security of drugs. Notably, the Department has participated fully in the national public information and education campaign, including the production of media material and leaflets in the Welsh language as well as in English which have been widely distributed to parents and young people. Extensive video training and education aids, for example, have been distributed to professional workers and schools, a high proportion of whom have accepted a free copy of the double tape video.

Those national educational activities have greatly assisted specific Welsh Office action which takes the following forms. First, at the Welsh Office's request, each county in Wales now has an active drugs advisory committee led by the local district health authority and composed of all the statutory professional and voluntary groups interested in combating drug misuse. The Department has kept in close touch with those committees and my impression is that for the most part they are working well together, particularly in Clwyd under the chairmanship of Michael Griffith.

Local planning is the second important aspect. Each drug advisory committee has been asked by the Welsh Office to produce a strategic plan for tackling drug misuse in each county. All plans have been submitted in draft and the Welsh Office has produced detailed comments on each. The counties are now in the process of preparing final versions and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to provide a firm basis for concerted local action over the next three to five years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn referred to improved educational resources, and in the current financial year and the next some £150,000 will be made available to each county in Wales. With regard to health education, the Welsh Office has funded the appointment in each county of a health education officer specialising in drug misuse. They will be encouraging activities in the community aimed at alerting young people to the dangers of drug misuse.

A significant investment has been made in providing advice, guidance and counselling to people suffeing from or in danger of drug misuse. Particular initiatives include centres at Swansea, Bangor, Bridgend, Cardiff and Newport.

As regards treatment, the emphasis has been on education and counselling. In the years ahead, one can expect the development of clinical treatment facilities. Community drug teams have been established, with Welsh Office funding, in Clwyd and Cardiff and they are the out-patient arms of hospital services.

We attach great importance to crisis intervention. We are concerned to provide easy access to help for those people and their relatives and friends who experience a drug misuse crisis. Welsh Office funding has enabled a nationwide Welsh drugs line to operate 24 hours a day. It reaches out to every town, village and hamlet. Although it is still in its early stages, the drugs line handles some 200 calls a month from all over Wales.

We believe that the voluntary sector complements the work of the statutory authorities. It is often in the best position to cater for the needs of drug misusers. In virtually every county the Welsh Office has funded the provision of voluntary sector services. In that regard, the leadership shown by the churches in north Wales and their work with the statutory authorities is especially encouraging. They are being helped by the Department.

All these developments are important in the context of national co-ordination. It is important to ensure that each drugs advisory committee shares its experiences—that is helpful in providing services—and that they co-operate to solve mutual problems. It is also important to ensure that the Welsh Office is well briefed on the experiences and views of those working in the field. Service planners must have ready access to information on Government initiatives.

All those functions are performed by the Welsh committee on drug misuse that met for the first time last month and I was pleased to attend that meeting. The committee is chaired by Dr. John Evans. It has a wide and

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

expert membership, including the secretaries of the Clwyd drug advisory committee and the Clwyd council on drug misuse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn went to considerable length to talk about funding. The comprehensive range of initiatives has relied upon the energy and commitment of a relatively small number of people in each county, and I should like to pay tribute to the effort that they have made. Their work has been made possible by the considerable financial investment from the Welsh Office. As my hon. Friend pointed out, in the past two financial years, the Department has spent almost £1·5 million on national and local initiatives. Much of that money has enabled local services to be provided that are of direct help to drug misusers, their families and friends.

The Department's commitment will continue. Currently we are considering further requests for the funding of local projects, including schemes in Clwyd. I hope to make an announcement about that when the detailed appraisal has been completed and the Welsh committee on drug misuse has been consulted.

In addition to training and information material for teachers, parents and pupils, the Welsh Office has made available £150,000 from the education support grant in 1986-87 and 1987-88 for the appointment of a special adviser on drug misuse in each county. They will be encouraging and assisting the work of teachers in schools.

I assure the House and my hon. Friend that the Welsh Office remains fully committed to the Government's fight against drug misuse. It is working closely with a wide range of service providers to ensure that young people and their parents are aware of drug misuse and that those entrapped by this evil are given the help that they need and deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 January 1987

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Alexander Ogorodnikov

9.35 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I beg leave to present a petition from the Rev. Arthur Venables and over 50 members of St. Lawrence Church, Cowley, Uxbridge concerning the condition in which the Soviet citizen Alexander Ogorodnikov is living. The prayer reads:

"That the Soviet Christian Alexander Ogorodnikov is in abject conditions in a Soviet labour camp on a charge arising from his leadership of a Christian discussion group.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House encourage the Foreign Secretary in his representations to the Soviet Government with the purposes of obtaining Mr. Ogorodnikov's release and reunion with his wife and son.

And you Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray".

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Free Television Licences for Pensioners Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me much pleasure to move the Bill's Second Reading. There is a number of worthwhile topics which one carefully considers when, out of the blue, a place is secured in the ballot. There is the certainly immediate surprise at having one's name chosen first.

Why this Bill? For a number of years my hon. Friends and I have pressed the need for pensioner households to be exempt from the payment of the television licence fee. I introduced a ten-minute Bill a few years ago and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has kept the issue alive in successive years, also by way of ten-minute Bills. The most recent occasion on which he introduced one was on 6 May 1986. I was always pleased to be a sponsor of my hon. Friend's proposed measures and so there is no sudden interest in the issue for me. I believe strongly in the justice and purpose of the Bill for reasons that my hon. Friends and I will be dealing with and explaining during today's proceedings.

There are those who argue that concessions for pensioners are basically wrong in principle. We are often told that what is required is sufficient income for the retired to choose how to spend their own money.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): That is the point; now sit down.

Mr. Winnick: Some of those outside the House who advance that argument are committed undoubtedly to advancing the pensioners' cause. One of the ironies, politically at least, is that the very people who are in favour of concessions, like members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, tend also to be generally strong advocates of real increases in the basic pension, while those who are, to say the least, reather lukewarm over concessions are not by any means necessarily at the forefront of the campaign to increase pensioners' living standards.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winnick: No. There are many hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to participate in the debate. I think that it will be wise for me to give way as seldom as possible.

I well remember the arguments which were advanced —this goes back over 20 years—against the need for reduced or free travel facilities for senior citizens, and I have no doubt that we shall have a rehash of those arguments later today. One intervention has just been made that reflects them. One of the arguments used against the idea of free travel was that by such a measure the retired would be singled out, stigmatised and perhaps even humiliated. All I can say is that not one of my constituents has complained to me of being humiliated by the bus pass.

Pensioners who enjoy such facilities—they are not enjoyed all over the country—are very pleased to have

[Mr. Winnick]

them, as they provide an opportunity to get out and see relatives and friends. There are few, if any, hon. Members—I include Conservative Members—who have argued against the bus pass in recent times. If the concession is wrong, why is not the bus pass taken away? Even this Government have been on the defensive in that respect regarding the Transport Act 1985 and its implications.

There is, rightly, no income test for the bus pass. Age is the only criterion apart from some form of disability. A few weeks ago, there was a gossip piece in a newspaper about the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) and his not having paid the bus fare, or some such silly allegation. He replied in *The Observer* on the following Sunday that he and he wife were travelling on their bus passes. Good luck to the right hon. Gentleman, although I should have thought that, 20 years ago, he would not have argued in favour of the bus pass. It has never been argued that people who can afford bus travel should not be eligible for the bus pass or for the concession on the Underground in London.

It is not part of my argument today that the television licence fee is wrong. I am aware that some people believe that there should be an alternative method of raising revenue for the BBC, but I believe that the licence fee is, in the main, good value for money. Bearing in mind the number of programmes that are available on all four channels, any alternative such as pay-as-you-view or subscription television would, apart from anything else, penalise people on small incomes. One would have to pay to obtain certain programmes. That is quite unlike the present arrangement under which one pays a fee and all programmes are available. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to learn that it is difficult to imagine anybody who is more strongly opposed to advertising on the BBC than I am.

It is understandable that pensioners watch a good deal more television than other people. There will today be many differences of view between the Government and me and my hon. and right hon. Friends, but I do not believe that there will be any argument about that statement. All of the statistics bear it out.

For many elderly people, television is the sole form of entertainment. As people grow older, it is more difficult for them to get out, so television becomes an important link with the outside world. In those cirumstances, television helps to overcome a good deal of loneliness. It is obvious that it cannot act as an effective substitute for personal contact, but it helps to make life more comfortable and to make pensioners feel less isolated in their own homes. That is all to the good. It is one of the virtues of television. It may have disadvantages, but that is one of its many advantages.

At paragraph 634, the Peacock report says that many pensioners

> "are especially dependent on television for information and entertainment."

There are approximately 2·8 million single pensioners living on their own who have television sets and a further 2 million pensioner couples who use television. It is interesting to note that, while most married pensioners have colour sets, about 1 million of the single pensioners have black and white sets. In some cases, perhaps, that is a matter of preference, but I should have thought that it was common ground that it is almost certainly in most cases a matter of cost.

If all pensioners were required to pay the licence fee, it might be more difficult to argue my case, but the matter is more complicated. In 1978, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) was Home Secretary, he rightly allowed people in warden-controlled accommodation to pay a nominal fee of 5p a year.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): There is an enormous amount of bitterness about that among people who live on their own. I get more complaints about it than about anything else.

Mr. Winnick: I did not realise that I should have such a strong and passionate advocate of my Bill in the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery).

Mr. Powley: I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's sincerity, and the concession that he mentions was introduced in 1978, but why did the then Labour Government not introduce free licences for all pensioners when they had an opportunity to do so?

Mr. Winnick: It is clear that the hon. Member is one of the intellectual thinkers of the Conservative party. I was not prepared for that intervention, although I should have known that it would come, even if I had been in politics for only a few minutes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] There is such a strong desire for me to answer that question that I must not disappoint Conservative Members.

We all know that reform often does not come as a whole. The concession for warden-controlled accommodation was welcome. We made it perfectly clear in our 1979 general election manifesto, however, that we would introduce a concession such as I am proposing. The Conservatives would have had great fun drawing attention to what we had promised if we had been returned and failed to implement that policy. Common sense dictates that, as it was in our manifesto, we would have implemented it if we had been returned to Government.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that elderly people cannot understand why people in sheltered accommodation come under the umbrella of the collective licence when they are expected to pay the full licence fee?

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not wish to disappoint any hon. Member, so I should say now that I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) who strongly supports the Bill, and then get on with my speech.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Does my hon. Friend agree that the concession was introduced in 1978 to bring sheltered accommodation into line with the Savoy hotel, which purchases one licence to cover every set in the hotel? Concessions were not introduced in the 1970s because, in view of the massive growth of colour television, BBC income rose at a tremendous rate and licence fee increases were kept low. That is no longer the case with colour saturation.

Mr. Winnick: That point is well made. Pensioners will be interested to hear how Conservative Members respond to a matter which is dear to the heart of many retired people.

The 5p a year licence was introduced in 1978. It was later extended to some physically disabled people, others in residential homes run by local authorities or private voluntary bodies, and people in sheltered housing. I said a few moments ago that reform comes in stages. That was another small reform, which I welcomed. I should have thought that Conservative Members would welcome it too.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Mellor): The hon. Gentleman seems to be basing his excuse for not having done anything about this matter when he was a Back Bencher in the last Labour Government on the fact that a major change was made in 1978. The change made then was a minor one and the real change was made in 1969. He will need a better excuse about why he sat on his backside and did nothing during the five years of office of the Labour Government.

Mr. Winnick: That is a rather inadequate way to explain the important concessions made at the time by a Labour Government. It is estimated that in all about 640,000 people pay 5p a year, the large majority of them being retired people and pensioners. In 1965, when there was a combined radio and television licence fee, it was decided that registered blind people should pay £1·25 a year, and this arrangement continued when licensing for radio ended. Clearly there are anomalies because of the differences in the amounts of money payable for the television licence fee.

I should like to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North-East (Mr. Park). The same point was made by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale. It was that there is a glaring anomaly in that those in warden-controlled accommodation rightly pay 5p a year while others not in such accommodation but in no better personal circumstances have to pay the full amount.

We are often told by constituents who complain to us that they find it difficult to understand and justify such a difference, such an anomaly. Very few hon. Members will not have had that point made to them time and again. In a single block of flats one part may be warden controlled while the other part is not. This anomaly should end and all pensioner households should be exempt from the licence fee.

Understandably, I have received many hundreds of letters about this subject. I apologise to many of the writers of those letters because, although I have been able to reply to some of them, it has been impossible because of the lack of facilities to reply to them all. I am grateful to those who have written in support of my Bill. I am sure that all hon. Gentlemen are grateful for the support that they receive for any public measure that they introduce. We do not sneer in this place at people who take the trouble to write letters. Good luck to them. We live in a democracy, and why should not people express a point of view, either for or against?

Of all the letters that I have received only one has been critical. Because of the pressure of time, I shall mention just one or two of those letters. From the Isle of Wight a pensioner writes that she sacrifices everything to get the money to be able to pay the £58 fee. She says:

"As I am on my own, my tv is a Godsend."

She says that out of an income of £38 a week she has to save weekly for electricity, water, insurance and gas and she says it is a great hardship to pay for things like the licence fee.

No doubt the Minister will say that the money need not be paid in one go. We know that and I do not deny that it is easier to pay by way of weekly or montly instalments. But at the end of the day it is still £58, and this is what the pensioner is complaining about. From Wales a correspondent says that the payment of the licence fee is "something dreaded" and is difficult to find because of other expenses. This person concludes—and I pass the message to the Minister of State:

"It should be a free vote and there should be no Whips on."

I shall return to that point later.

I propose to mention in a moment the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington). I had a letter from a pensioner in Preston who says that she lives in a close of 15 bungalows designed for the elderly and the handicapped. Four of the bungalows enjoy the facilities of a warden scheme and receive the concession of 5p a year; the rest pay the full amount. She adds:

"Nevertheless some of these 11 are just as old, handicapped and near housebound as those paying the 5p"

I am not sure whether that person is a constituent because I mentioned Preston. Nevertheless, she wrote to the Minister of State, Home Office. I sent him a note to the effect that I would mention this. He replied to this lady and said in his letter:

"the position cannot reasonably be defended."

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): Did I not make it entirely plain that what I said could not be reasonably defended was the 5p concession, and that as a matter of practical politics we could not get rid of it but that that was no argument for saying that the situation should be made even more absurd by extending the concession to all?

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister understand what he says? He has said that the anomaly exists and should be ended by doing away with the 5p concession.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I said nothing of the sort. I said that once an anomaly of that kind has been created it is impossible to get rid of it by removing the concession, but that that was no conceivable argument for making the situation even more confused by extending a similar concession to others.

Mr. Ashton: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making the position even worse for himself.

Mr. Winnick: As my hon. Friend says, the second intervention by the Minister makes the situation from his point of view much worse. We take the view that there is a glaring anomaly and that the way to end it is to ensure that all pensioner households have the same right and the same benefit.

Another letter writer lives in Lewes in Sussex, not usually considered the safest of Labour territory. The writer lives in a block of four council flats and the ages of the occupants are 92, 82, 75 and 73. Because the accommodation is not warden controlled, the full amount has to be paid despite the low incomes.

Another letter will interest a Conservative Member because it is from a person in Attleborough, in Norfolk.

[Mr. Winnick]

She is 76 and lives alone without a family. She writes that the TV is her only companion and she says that, as she relies on the state pension and a little supplementary benefit, the licence fee is an extra bill to pay and the money is difficult to find. This pensioner wrote in support of my Bill to her Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins). The hon. Gentleman is not here but, in the usual way I gave him notice that I would mention this. In his reply to her he said:

"if pensioners were to have a free licence for TV, how would those people who do not have a TV or who do not want one be able to receive the same benefit . . . Many people do not want TV and would rather spend the money, say, on their car or on records . . ."

He tells his constituent that in those circumstances he does not feel that he can support my Bill. Perhaps that constituent should worry about her car or her records and not about the TV licence.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): She should worry about her MP.

Mr. Winnick: I am unlikely to disagree with that remark by my hon. Friend.

We know that Peacock recommended that pensioner households on supplementary benefit should be exempt from the licence fee. On top of all the anomalies that I have mentioned the Peacock committee which no one has suggested is in any way a Left-wing body, makes the firm recommendation that pensioners on supplementary benefit should be exempt from the licence fee and that those paying 5p a year should no longer do so, because apparently it costs more to collect the money than it generates in revenue. I agree with that recommendation. The committee rejected the extension of the concession to all pensioners and my Bill does that as well.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is a master of the part quotation. He slides over the first point that the Peacock recommendation was a much narrower concession than his. He fails to mention that Peacock recognised, unlike him, that there is no such thing as a free lunch and that this measure would have to be paid for. Peacock suggested that it should be paid for by a £10 car wireless licence. Is that part of the hon. Gentleman's proposal?

Mr. Winnick: I do not want to engage in a verbal challenge. I hope that we can conduct the debate on a proper basis. However, I find the "free lunch" expression rather offensive to the type of people whom I have mentioned. I think that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will agree it was not appropriate to say that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Clearly, if the concession were confined to those on supplementary benefit, another anomaly would be created. Many pensioners on just slightly more than supplementary benefit would find that an injustice had been done, so it would be far better to accept my proposal.

Although I do not believe that the concession should be confined to those on supplementary benefit, even that would be better than nothing. It would help some people. Some Conservative Members jeered when I began my remarks about piecemeal reforms. If the concessions were confined to pensioners on supplmentary benefit, to the extent that that would help some of our fellow citizens it would be better than nothing. I am not dogmatic. No doubt we shall hear a great deal from the Minister of State and other Conservative Members about how properous pensioners are. I am sure that the Minister already has these points in his notes. We shall probably hear that millionaires will benefit under my Bill. But that is a strange argument by a Government who not only have given substantial concessions and relief in virtually every Budget since 1979 to the rich and prosperous but boast that, as long as they continue in office, they will follow the same road. Is it the logic of the Government's case that although that is all right, it is wrong to give any concessions to the well off if, at the same time, under my Bill the majority on low incomes will benefit?

Conservative Members rarely complain about concessions to the rich and elderly. When Tory Chancellors announce concessions in their Budgets, Conservative Members never complain. They never argue. "Rich people already have had many tax benefits. Why should they be given more?" In Committee on Finance Bills, Conservative Members usually table amendments to extend those concessions. Today we shall hear from Consevative Members how shocking and horrible it is that perhaps some rich people will benefit under my Bill, but there is no shock or horror when Tory Chancellors give tax concessions to the wealthy in Budget after Budget.

My Bill will cost £225 million each year. I do not deny that. The Government abolished the investment income surcharge but, if it were restored in the current financial year it would raise for the Exchequer revenue of no less than £825 million. It is interesting to note that, in Committee on the Finance Bill, the fact that hardly anyone with capital of less than £70,000 was liable to pay that tax was not challenged. Conservative Members did not suggest a means test or say that that was wrong, so let there be no hypocrisy today about my Bill.

It appears from the Library's figures that about one third of pensioner households are on supplementary benefit. As we know, that is the smallest possible sum on which people can try to manage day by day. If the definition of poverty were broadened to include those earning up to 40 per cent. above supplementary benefit level, that would cover 64 per cent. of pensioner households. Undoubtedly, a large majority of the people who would benefit from my Bill would be those on small incomes at poverty or near poverty level. It is nonsense to say that my Bill is aimed at helping millionaires.

It would have been wrong for me to have introduced a Bill of this nature without putting forward recommendations on how the shortfall should be made up. I make it perfectly clear that it should be made up from taxes. I have not tried to get round the problem by putting forward other choices. As clause 3 shows, the money would be made up from taxation.

The cost of my Bill would be less than one fifth of 1 per cent. of taxation revenue. I do not believe that any taxpayer would complain about paying that extra amount so that elderly people could be assisted in the way that I have suggested.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), wrote on 25 September last year to a Conservative Member of the European Parliament who had been contacted by a constituent. In the last paragraph, the Minister said:

"We are now considering the Committee's recommendations"—

the Peacock committee's recommendations—

"which require careful study, and will reach final views on them only in the light of Parliamentary and public reaction."

That is interesting, because, undoubtedly, public reaction has been in support of my Bill.

My Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should be given a Second Reading and be allowed to go into Committee. I believe that I should be given the opportunity in Committee to respond constructively, as I would do, to any amendments that go some way towards meeting my aims. If the Government said that in no circumstances would they accept the whole measure but would phase it in, I should be disappointed but accept that. I should accept any proposals along the lines that I have advocated.

It would be disgraceful if later today, at 1 o'clock or half-past 1, Cabinet Ministers on very high salaries trooped into the Lobby on a three-line Whip to deny pensioners on the lowest possible incomes a free television licence. What I am advocating is fair and justified. If I am defeated in a Tory-dominated House of Commons on a whipped vote of Cabinet Ministers, I shall carry on the campaign with my right hon. and hon. Friends. We shall not give up, because we believe that we are right. If we do not get this concession for pensioners from a Tory Government, we shall ensure that it comes from a Labour Government.

10.8 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): The subject of today's debate is regarded as important by many pensioners and should be taken seriously. It is right that we should devote some time to it. However, I believe that the analysis of the problem by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is defective, and his solution is therefore bound to be wrong.

Many pensioners regard television as a necessity, in the sense that they would give up many items that are accepted as necessary before they would be prepared to sacrifice their television viewing. No one should be scornful of that fact. Although I am not an uncritical observer of broadcasting, I argue that the BBC provides excellent value for money in return for the licence fee. Although television costs us only a few pence a day, the annual licence fee is one of the largest payments that pensioners make. Of course, there is a savings scheme, but it is not a true instalments scheme. Pensioners probably give more thought to that payment than they do to other items which represent a larger share of their budget but which are paid for in smaller amounts at more frequent intervals.

What rankles with many people, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, is not so much the fact that there is a licence fee as that there is a licence fee concession from which a minority of people benefit who are not always those most in need of help. We should address that issue.

Spending a great deal more money, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North suggests, to give all pensioner viewers free licences might have superficial attractions to some, but it would not be a sensible way of extending the social security system. It has obvious disadvantages. It would be a blunt instrument that would benefit the wealthy as well as the poor, regardless of need. It would cost about £230 million even if only pensioners living alone were included. The cost might have to be paid for by an increase in the licence fee for everyone else or, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North suggested, by higher taxation. Many of those who would have to pay the bill could be substantially poorer than a large proportion of pensioners.

The proposal extends a benefit in kind, which conflicts greatly with the sensible view of organisations representing pensioners that improved benefits should be provided in cash, giving pensioners the choice of how they wish to use it. My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) made a sensible point in his letter to his constituents. The pensioners who would gain least would be those who, perhaps as a result of a loss of sight or of hearing, cannot enjoy television. But they could use cash benefits in other more fruitful ways.

The anomalies in the concessionary system cause difficulty — *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that so many Opposition Members cannot treat this seriously.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not a fact that, a few minutes ago, the hon. Gentleman—a very wealthy man—deplored the expenditure of £230 million and is trying to weave an argument against giving the pensioners what we want to give them? Did not the Conservative Government, overnight, provide £250 million to bail out the multi-millionaires Johnson Matthey? Is that the morality that he accepts, instead of giving the pensioners what they want?

Mr. Waller: I wish that the hon. Gentleman's first suggestion was right. If I were led astray by the hon. Gentleman into discussing his more general point, I would soon be ruled out of order. I shall speak about the issues that we have come here to discuss, not about those which apparently concern the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery).

The anomalies that arise from the concessionary system cause the difficulties. At the time, the provision of a concession for residential homes seemed to be a humane step, and including pensioners who live in different sorts of sheltered accommodation seemed to many to be a further advance. It then became difficult to ignore the claims of handicapped people who live in sheltered accommodation, so they too, were included. But every time we move the qualifying line, we create a cause for more aggrieved people who have been omitted. That would be so whatever step one took in extending concessions.

Many of my elderly constituents earnestly desire a move to sheltered accommodation, but because of the shortage of such a provision they must continue to live alone in houses that are far from ideal. Perhaps the case for a concession could most reasonably be made for those people rather than for those who enjoy the company of other elderly people.

In my constituency there is a Sue Ryder hospice, Manorlands, where cancer patients often stay for several months. As it is a nursing home, which does not qualify under the regulations, patients, who are often confined to bed, must have their own licences if they have their own television sets.

The faults in the system are glaring, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, was right not to conceal in his letter the fact that the present system cannot be defended. But I wish to be constructive. It is possible to reform the system. Even those who benefit from the present concession accept that it is unfair and would see the justice in a system which

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benefited all pensioners alike. A Government who abolished the present unsatisfactory concession would, therefore, not be bombarded with an undue number of complaints if it could be seen that something fairer had been put in its place.

If we agreed that something had to replace the existing system—which is probably true—I would start with the concept that it should be equivalent in value to a monochrome licence, which costs £18. Its appeal would be that it would provide beneficiaries with the choice of having a black and white set without further charge, thus effectively giving them a free licence, or topping up the amount, as most would choose to do, to enjoy the advantages of colour. At that level, the cost to the Chancellor would still be substantial, although it would be much less than the cost of the proposals contained in the Bill.

Mr. Ashton: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that that can already be done? In local councils such as Bassetlaw, pensioners have the option of a free bus pass to take them anywhere, or a free black and white television licence. One third of them opt for the television licence. If Bassetlaw council can do it, why cannot Tory councils do it?

Mr. Waller: It is a matter for individual councils. I am sure that Bassetlaw is not the only one that makes flexible arrangements.

The cost to the Chancellor and to the taxpayer could be reduced by linking the new, more general concession with the benefit which pensioners and some others receive once a year—the Christmas bonus. It has remained at £10 since it was created, but the money will buy much less than it used to, although it has always been paid, except when the Labour Government failed to do so after the International Monetary Fund required public expenditure to be drastically pruned. The Christmas bonus is regarded today as a bit of extra pocket money, but it could become a much-valued benefit to pensioners if it was topped up to the value of a monochrome television licence.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): There may be merit in the hon. Gentleman's argument, although I do not accept it. I hope that he will vote for the Bill so that we can have the advantage of debating his arguments in committee.

Mr. Waller: The Bill is so defective that it does not even begin to address the problem.

If the £10 Christmas bonus was topped up to the value of a monochrome television licence, it would still be worth less in real terms than it was when it was introduced. It could be paid in the form of a voucher which pensioners could use to purchase their licence whenever the fee became due. However, if someone chose to spend the money differently—some people may have no use for a television because of blindness or for another reason—it would be his right. It would be a benefit paid in cash, not in kind. The cost to the Chancellor of a generally available voucher could be offset against the existing Christmas bonus and the £22 million which the abolition of the present concessionary scheme will save.

The cost of the official Labour party proposal for a free colour licence for all would be £330 million. The much more limited plan that I have suggested would cost a fraction of that, but I believe that it would be seen as being fair, and it would be popular.

Both the Labour party official proposal and the slightly less expensive main provision of the Bill can be considered only as ineffective and wasteful. There is no suggestion of how the bill would be paid—that is the case with so much expenditure proposed by the Labour party. We know that many of those who would write the cheque would be more disadvantaged than those who would benefit. That is why the Bill cannot be supported, but we should nevertheless take action as soon as possible to get rid of the niggle which otherwise will come back to haunt us time and time again.

10.20 am

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to support the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). I promise to be brief as I appreciate the strength of feeling about the Bill and I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak.

In my area of Barnsley, East there is a strong caring community. Both the local authority and my constitents care very much for the quality of life of the elderly. The local authority does all it can although, on occasions, central Government handicap its desires. The local authority is strong on providing sheltered units and warden schemes. It has formed community clubs to encourage youngsters to visit pensioners, dig their gardens and, in extreme cases, to paint their homes. It is trying to maintain transport facilities for the elderly even though the Transport Act 1985 has created problems. It is in a constant battle with the Government trying to help the elderly in my constituenty. Many of my constituents do voluntary work and in every village there is an old folks centre where they spend a great deal of time. Every pub and club provide coach trip parties and get-togethers for their elderly members.

My constituents do such work for no reward, and I am very proud of them and the Barnsley metropolitan authority. We care about the quality of life of our elderly and we feel strongly that the Bill will make a contribution to their quality of life. I hope that the Members will support the Bill today.

We are all aware of the many sacrifices that elderly people make to pay their licences to ensure that they keep their television sets. They regard their television almost as a friend, knowing it to be a virtual lifeline in the sense that it keeps them in touch with what is going on in the world and also entertains them.

There is no valid argument against the Bill on the grounds that it would not be a tremendous asset to the elderly. The argument will be based on finance and such arguments have already been advanced by Conservative Members. Yet some Conservative Members would think nothing of taking their wives out for dinner tonight and spending more than a cost of a television licence in that one night. One evening's pleasure as opposed to one year's pleasure. Perhaps that is the measure of the haves and have nots in Britain today.

We all know that if the Government have the will they will find the money. Only this week the Government cut the red tape that protects them from spending money. The Government have done a U-turn on the payment of heating allowances as a result of public pressure and pressure in the House. The Government found billions of pounds to finance the fight against the miners—a fight they created. The Government paid £1,000 to each person

who worked at GCHQ to buy off their democratic right to belong to a trade union. If the Government are willing they can find the money.

Yesterday, the Institute of Directors published proposals calling for £4 billion worth of tax cuts. I am sure that Conservative Members will listen carefully to that proposal. Such evidence weakens the Government's arguments against the Bill.

Only this week a statement has been made proposing that the BBC should chase its licence defaulters. That would increase the cost faced by the BBC and therefore I cannot understand how the Government can argue that they are concerned about BBC revenue.

Mr. Ashton: Is my hon. Friend aware that this week the Prime Minister, who is a pensioner, went to the opera? For every performance at the opera, the top price seats attract a subsidy of £42. The Government can pay that but they cannot pay for pensioners to watch the opera on television.

Mr. Patchett: I appreciate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). No doubt, if pensioners were to take advantage of that facility, the Government would seek to withdraw it. Such is the callousness of the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North has taken account of BBC financing in the Bill. Estimates suggest that the cost of the Bill would be £225 million. That is chicken-feed compared to other Government spending. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North has already gone into the anomalies of the present system and I will not go on about 5p and so on. The Bill would eradicate all those anomalies.

I ask all Members to support the Bill today and show respect to pensioners — a respect that they rightly deserve from the country.

10.26 am

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): I declare my interest in the Granada group and also as chairman of Croydon Cable Television. I recall that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), in a previous political incarnation, had a particular interest in this desirable area.

Having heard the speech of the hon. Member for Walsall, North and having read his Bill I must concede that it is more reasonable than the Labour party proposals put forward by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on Wednesday. The right hon. Gentleman said that all pensioners should be given free television licences. Such a general blanket concession to people, including those who clearly do not need it is well out of date. Any modern Government must appreciate that, with an aging population, the justified demand on social services will be almost impossible to meet. Therefore, to start distributing money to those who do not need it is not sensible.

I support the principle — opposed rather than ridiculed by the hon. Member for Walsall, North—that benefits should be in the form of increased income rather than directed at individual grievances. That is a principle that has always been adopted by the Labour party. In 1978 the then Home Secretary the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) rejected the idea of abolishing television licences for pensioners on the grounds that:

"Such a proposal would cost the best part of £90 million . . . and the Government believe that it is better to continue to treat old-age pensioners in the way in which we have treated them, with the extra money being paid across the board in the past four years, rather than to do it in the way my hon. Friend suggests."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1978; Vol. 954, c. 1581.]

That is what the right hon. Gentleman used to say in those days.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North rightly maintains that there are often exceptions to such general principles. I agree, especially when the exception is, say, a bus pass. That concession benefits overwhelmingly those who are poor. The less income a citizen has, the more likely he is to use publid transport. Consequently, that concession workd well and is not a bad exception.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Is the hon. Gentleman quite sure about that? In these days of deregulation, buses have been taken off routes. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that in my constituency many poor people have to stay at home and watch television. Consequently, I believe that the Bill will benefit far more poor elderly people than bus passes do.

Sir Paul Bryan: That is a fairly tortuous argument, but I still maintain that it is the poorer citizens who benefit from bus passes.

The Bill is reasonable to the extent that it at least contains limits and is confined to households consisting only of pensioners, and so on. We must clearly give the hon. Member for Walsall, North credit for trying to improve the lot of our poorer viewers who have to pay such a high licence fee. Consequently, in arguing against the Bill it is our duty to say how we propose to improve the lot of those in that category.

At first the BBC licence fee was reasonable and was seen to be reasonable. There was initially only one channel, operated by the BBC, and we paid a licence for that. That was understandable. Then ITV arrived and the situation became 50 per cent. less satisfactory because people could easily and reasonably question why they should pay the licence fee if they watched only ITV.

However, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) pointed out, that grievance was blurred by the fact that the licence had a natural buoyancy. The increasing number of television sets meant that the licence fee stayed still. There was another surge of licence income buoyancy with the arrival of colour television. However, as soon as that natural buoyancy started to decrease, the licence fee increased and was questioned more and more. It is now highly questionable. The BBC is more than conscious of that, hence its fight to increase ratings in the knowledge that the fewer viewers is has, the less justified the licence fee appears to be.

We are talking about the licence fee for the next 15 years, or perhaps less than that. By then it will have become intolerable, A quarter of the population will probably have cable. Those people will already be paying £10 to £20 for 20 to 30 choices, and so they will justifiably object even more to paying extra for the BBC. In addition, many services will reach us via satellites, although none of us knows how many there will be. Therefore, whereas at the beginning of television there was only one channel which was paid for by one licence fee there will in future be perhaps two BBC channels among perhaps 50 channels being offered to the public. It will then seem quite unreasonable to pay such a licence fee.

The Government have agreed that in such circumstances the licence will be untenable. They have

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provisionally adopted the Peacock idea of pay television for the BBC. I have already argued that I do not believe that that is possible. However, that is not the subject of today's debate.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Obviously, the hon. Gentleman has great experience in the provision of cable television. But, given the argument that he has just expounded, will he be saying that his and other companies will connect pensioners' houses so that they can receive cable television if it is provided free? In the case of satellite broadcasting, what does the hon. Gentleman have to say about the dish aerials? There is the question of the hardware that must be provided to give people such a great potential choice of programmes.

Sir Paul Bryan: That is right. I am arguing in the most general way, and I am not saying exactly who will have these things. But as a general proposition, the proportion of services offered by the BBC for which one must pay will be much smaller than at present, and so the postiion will be less tolerable.

Mr. Flannery: Will the hon. Gentleman relate his remarks to the Bill? He has taken us into the future, but what relevance does that have for the Bill?

Sir Paul Bryan: It has the relevance that I have just outlined. I said that, if I wanted to reject the Bill, I should first say what I believe can be done to improve the lot of licence payers.

In the meantime, the viewer has another grievance which will be met by indexation. He does not know when there will be an increase in the licence fee. Page 14 of the Peacock report shows that in the past 10 years there have been six increases in the licence fee at intervals of two years, one year, two years and three years. No one knows when that increase will have to be paid. All of a sudden the viewer is asked for an increase. Also, the amount by which the licence fee is increased is unpredictable. In one year, between 1978 and 1979, the licence fee increased by £9. Two years later it increased by £12, and after another three years it increased by another £12. Those are enormous increases on the lump sum. This unpredictability will be put right also by indexation.

But there is yet another grievance, and that is the size of the lump sum and the fact that it all has to be paid at once. In his statement on Wednesday, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary offered some encouraging words when he said:

"We aim to increase convenience of payment for the consumer; to help those in financial difficulty to spread the cost of the fee;"—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 264.]

That is much more important than it sounds. Twenty years ago I held the lofty post of shadow Postmaster-General. Being diligent, I went to several post offices to see how the licence fee was collected. I was appalled to see how inefficiently collected it was. That was not surprising. It is very unpleasant to have to go round getting money from people. As a result, the staff gave it the lowest priority, and the job did not really get done. Page 12 of the Peacock report shows that that situation persists to this day, and 1·6 million people do not pay the fee.

At that time I happened to be a director of Granada Television Rentals Ltd. In order to stay in business, the company has to please the people from whom it collects money. Tremendous efforts were made to find out the easiest way for people to pay. Many alternatives were offered to make payment effective. Not many people wanted to pay by bankers order, but if someone wanted to do so, that was made possible. Many chose to pay weekly, calling at a pleasant shop where they were welcomed. I conclude that this sort of attitude should be adopted in collecting the licence fee. Much greater effort should be made.

I am therefore glad that the Home Secretary is accepting recommendation 4 of the Peacock committee, to which I draw the attention of the House—

"To permit the BBC to be the managing agent in the collection of the licence fee, the Post Office should be released from its responsibility as agent to the Home Office for collection and enforcement procedures associated with the licence fee. The BBC should become responsible for inviting proposals for collection and enforcement procedures and for identifying the most efficient and economic collection and enforcement system.

The Post Office, of course, could tender for the role of agent."

I cannot forecast who would tender for the licence fee collecting agency. I doubt if television rental companies would be interested. Nevertheless, for the fee of £45 million now paid to the Post Office there must be a number of money collecting organisations which would be keen to take on that job. The collection of licences could be done much more humanely and sensitively.

In conclusion, I do not reject the case that something must be done and that much more thought must be given to the poorer licence payers. They have legitimate grievances but not grievances that can be cured by this Bill.

10.41 am

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I welcome the opportunity today to vote for extending the opportunities for pensioners and other people to enjoy the concession of a free television licence.

I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading today and thus provide an opportunity for those Conservative Members who have already spoken a chance to amend the Bill and to introduce some of their ideas, because although the Bill is a broad-brush attempt to extend the concession, it creates major anomalies. Some people who could afford to pay for the licence would be given the concession, while many hundreds, if not thousands, of people who would desire and deserve a concession, would not receive it.

This week I met an elderly constituent while I was trying to get her an added heating allowance. She spoke of her plight if the Bill was passed. She would not qualify for the concession under the Bill because, regrettably, she has two mentally handicapped sons, both in their forties. There must be an opportunity in Committee to draw out those anomalies and find ways of improving what must be seen as a major step forward.

It would be a mistake on the part of any hon. Member to vote against the Second Reading today. I hope and pray that hon. Members will accept the spirit in which the Bill has been presented and will adopt an open mind and an enlightened attitude to it. It would be too easy to reject it out of hand and lose an opportunity to improve the major anomalies in the system, which have already been highlighted.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his speech. He has made it clear that he intends to vote in favour of the Bill. Why is it, therefore, that the alliance manifesto, "Working together for Britain", used at the last election — a document not short on electoral bribes to pensioners — mentioned nothing, even in a broad-brush way, that could remotely approximate to what he will now vote for?

Mr. Hancock: If the hon. Gentleman reads our next manifesto, which I hope he will do, he will see that, like all things in politics, matters move forward. People realise that change has to be made. I am sure the hon. Gentleman remembers that old cliché that someone who never changes his mind never changes anything. This is a clear example of the way in which the alliance is becoming more flexible and believes that those who desire a broader interpretation of the concession should be given an opportunity to gain it. The alliance's approach to this matter is on the right track.

I hope that this will not be an issue at the general election and that the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), will receive the support of the House so that the matter will be dealt with long before we have to face the electorate. There is undoubtedly a demand within the country for these changes to take place.

I have a letter from a Mr. Welland who is employed in the TV licensing department in Portsmouth. Last October, in a letter to the Portsmouth local authority in reply to its query on how the present rules could be interpreted, he said:

"You will appreciate that it is not possible to provide a comprehensive statement of the facilities which would confer entitlement to the concessionary licence."

Those concessions cannot be given because it is difficult to provide a comprehensive statement. Mr. Welland went on to provide the local authority with the conditions of eligiblity, but said that there were grey and murky areas in which there could be widespread misinterpretation and confusion.

If the people who implement the present rules do not have a clear picture of how this can be managed, surely something must be done. Indeed, a recent letter from the Home Office to one of my constituents said:

"Perhaps I should first explain that there is a special television licence for certain old people's homes and sheltered housing schemes. It was not intended to be a welfare concession, but was introduced to provide a uniform system of licensing in old people's homes and comparable residential accommodation for pensioners . . . The Home Secretary recognises that television is an important source of information and entertainment for many elderly people."

My constituent recognises that the present system gives rise to grave areas of doubt and anomalies and that it is a cause of resentment. The Home Office and the Home Secretary recognise, as do the people interpreting the rules, that the current scheme has major problems. Surely, therefore, there can be no excuse for saying that nothing should be done and that we should leave the scheme as it is.

Once again, I draw on my constituency experience. This week the housing department in Portsmouth provided me with a list which tells me that in six major tower blocks, each with more than 120 dwellings, in nearly every block more than 50 per cent. of the inhabitants are granted the concession. The anomalies are too big to ignore. Two people live on the same floor in adjacent flats. One occupies a one-bedroom flat and receives the concession, while his nextdoor neighbour, who lives in exactly the same circumstances, except that because there was no one-bedroom accommodation available had to be given a two-bedroom flat, has to pay the full licence. It is impossible to argue against the need to change that state of affairs.

I defy the Home Secretary, the Minister of State, or anyone else to defend the position that where two pensioners live on the same floor of a block of flats, the only difference being that one has a one-bedroom flat and the other has a two-bedroomed flat, one has to pay £58 and the other has to pay only 5p. The position is indefensible, but, nevertheless, giving the concession to every pensioner would be wrong. As I said, there are many pensioners who can well afford to pay the licence fee. There are many examples, which do not need to be repeated by me today, of people who can and will continue to pay for the licence, but there are many non-pensioners who should be given the concession. I have in mind the long-term unemployed and people who, for other reasons, are unable to meet the full cost because of their predicament and the way in which society has plunged them into major problems.

Changes must be made. The alliance has said that the Peacock report went along the right lines and drew out those anomalies. It tried to perform a duty by recognising that difficulties existed, and also that there were difficulties in finding a solution to the problem, such as how to compensate the BBC for the loss of revenue. The hon. Member for Walsall, North also made this point. The hon. Member made it clear that at the end of the day his legislation would not involve major costs and that the sum should be found to make the concession system fairer and more realistic. It would be wrong to ignore the call of the British people for these changes. I can think of few matters that have so united people as this one has in their attempt to bring it to the attention of Parliament in the nearly three years that I have been here. Nor have all those people been pensioners. Many people believe that we have a duty to recognise this unfairness and to respond to it. The Minister cannot possibly make a case to defend the present position. He may come to the House in an enlightened mood today and tell us what the Government intend to make the system fairer in a way that would make the Bill unnecessary, but I doubt that. That is why it is critical that we support the Bill and send it to Committee, where hon. Members can amend it.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The hon. Gentleman referred to the need to send the Bill to Committee. May I remind the House that we have had five Bills of this type since 1979 and that not one has succeeded in reaching a Committee? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Conservative Members, who rightly have made it clear that something should be done, no matter how small, have a moral duty to give the Bill a chance so that it can be amended, especially after our experience with the previous five Bills?

Mr. Hancock: I could not agree more, and that statement comes from an hon. Member with much more experience of the workings of the House than I have. He recognises the frustration felt outside the House and that people feel that we must be a strange animal to recognise

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that something is wrong, yet not be prepared to change it. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the House has had an opportunity to do something about it on five occasions.

It would be foolish for us to reject yet another opportunity. I am sure that many hon. Members support the spirit of the Bill. Conservative Members who represent surrounding constituencies have been quoted in my local newspaper as supporting the Bill, and some Conservative Members have signed early-day motions supporting a change. It will be remarkable if they are not in the Lobby today to support the Second Reading of the Bill. Our pensioners will not easily forgive those who say one thing in letters and early-day motions, and another with their feet when they vote. I hope that all hon. Members will recognise the need to change the legislation.

10.52 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Mellor): I should like to assure the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) that his invitation to consider double standards is one that I fully intend to take up during my remarks. I am glad to have the opportunity to intervene so early in the debate and I should like to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on his good fortune in being drawn first in the ballot. I am sorry that my remaining remarks will not give him much satisfaction, but he, having been a Member of Parliament on and off for 20 years, will know perfectly well why I take this line. He knows perfectly well that my line is consistent with that of every Minister in every Government since the war when this hardy perennial has come before the House. It is only that the tune of some hon. Members changes when they move into Opposition. Then they find much more favour for this change than ever they were prepared to countenance when their party was in Government.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 1 July 1966, on 16 February 1968 and on 7 February 1969 voted repeatedly against a Bill introduced to give a pension to pensioners over 80—*[Interruption.]* It was no laughing matter for the people concerned—who were the oldest people in the country and too old to join the national insurance scheme in 1948. Is that not an example of selective compassion? He shows great compassion when a Conservative Government are in power and no compassion when a Labour Government are in power.

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend is right. So much of what Opposition Members say is based on the assumption that no one remembers anything before yesterday, but we all do. The hon. Member for Walsall, North had the temerity to laugh at what at the time was a most pressing political issue: that of giving a pension to pensioners over 80 who were too old to be part of the pension scheme. That was left to the succeeding Conservative Government. Then he has the gall to rebuke us for our attitudes to pensioners. While I have some hard things to say about the cynical exploitation of pensioners which is being evidenced by the speeches from Opposition Members today, let it in no sense be taken as a lack of sympathy for the plight of pensioners either on my part or on that of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I shall begin by differentiating clearly between our approach towards the legitimate aspirations of pensioners and our approach towards the cynical opportunism of the Opposition. They are two different matters.

Through their actions the Government have shown more effectively than any of their predecessors their concern for pensioners. In order that there should be no misunderstanding about that, I shall give the evidence. If an Opposition Member wishes to tell me that any of my statistics are wrong, I shall gladly give him the opportunity to do so because we hear a great deal of empty wind-baggery, which is wholly divorced from the real facts of the Government's record.

Government spending on pensioners has increased by 25 per cent. in real terms since the financial year 1978-79. The total cost of the old-age retirement pension is £18,000 million. That is the clearest possible evidence of the Government's commitment to maintaining and enhancing the living standards of pensioners.

Mr. Ashton: Fiddled figures.

Mr. Mellor: It is a great shame that this noted columnist in the national press is so incapable of listening to other people's arguments. He might write a better-informed column next week if he had the courtesy to listen.

Mr. Ashton: Why does the Minister start his figures in 1978 rather than in 1979 when the Tories took over?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman seems to show a lamentable lack of knowledge of the way in which finances are calculated in accusing me of fiddling the figures. The last financial year for which the Labour Government were responsible was 1978-79.

Mr. Ashton: That was when we were in power.

Mr. Mellor: Yes, exactly. The hon. Gentleman seems to be showing even less insight than he normally does. I am comparing the last full year of the Labour Government with the present year of the Conservative Government. That shows a 25 per cent. increase in real terms in the sum allocated to the welfare of pensioners.

Notwithstanding the fact——

Mr. Ashton: What about the 1 million extra pensioners?

Mr. Mellor: I was about to make that very point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Will the hon. Gentleman now listen? Will he promise to keep his trap shut from a sedentary position for just one minute while I explain? Will he make that little deal? I shall deal with the 1 million extra pensioners if this distinguished man of letters will keep his mouth shut for one minute. Is it a deal? Of the £4 billion in extra resources which we have deployed to improve the welfare of pensioners, £1·75 billion has financed the 1 million extra pensioners and £2·25 billion financed increased benefit for all pensioners.

Mr. Ashton: Is it not a fact that when the Government came into power, old-age pensions were increased to the cost of living or the increase in the national average age, whichever was the higher? The Government took away the link to the national wage increase and tied the pension to the cost of living index only. This year, if the Labour party formula had been continued, instead of the 45p increase in pensions there would have been an increase of nearer £3. Since 1979, a pensioner couple would have been £13 better off under our formula, and a single person £8 better off.

Mr. Mellor: On three opportunities out of four the Labour Government did not do it. They had to fiddle the basis on which pensions were calculated, because the historic inflation was so high, and move it to a prediction of inflation, which they persistently got wrong, because they hoped that the amount that they would have to pay out on a prediction of inflation would be less than if they had to pay out for historic inflation.

The hon. Gentleman, that great pillar of popular journalism, who seeks to curry favour with ordinary folk on the basis that he can pull the wool over their eyes, supported the Government that could not, in two years out of five, even pay the £10 Christmas bonus to the pensioners. We want a little less cant and hypocrisy from the Opposition Benches.

Our spending on pensioners is the third highest in Europe when related to the size of our economy. Not only is the old-age pension more than fully compensating for the rises in the cost of living, but additional assistance is available to 1·7 million pensioners on supplementary pensions and 4·1 million pensioners on housing benefit. Pensioners today, instead of being left to freeze through the winter of discontent as they were in 1978-79 with no extra help, are receiving not only the greatly increased heating supplements that the Government have regularly paid but additional emergency assistance for dealing with particularly adverse circumstances.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that the Minister and the Government are embarrassed by the Bill. We have had debates all this week on pensions and such matters. I am sure that the Minister does not want to repeat them. Will you ask him to answer the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, or the occupant of the Chair, does not determine what should be in speeches. It is my job to see that order is being preserved, and the Minister is not out of order in what he is saying.

Mr. Mellor: I appreciate the sincerity of the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) in most of the matters on which he speaks, and I am sorry that it is necessary for us to fall out today. I cannot say the same for some of his colleagues.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) *rose*—

Mr. Mellor: I shall now accept the invitation to get on, and I shall give way to the hon. Lady later.

We have created that pearl beyond price for the pensioner, the low inflation economy, which is the best protection for his standard of living, as against the Labour party's average inflation of 15 per cent. In its spending plans, the Labour party acknowledges that inflation will go up, but apparently, as he contemplates the ravages of increased prices on every basic commodity, the pensioner will at least be consoled by being able to watch EastEnders for nothing. I wonder how many pensioners will find that a particularly attractive proposition.

If I were asked to sum up what has been happening to pensioners during this Government, I could best do so through an analysis by the Family Expenditure Survey, which deals with the period 1979-85. The hon. Member for Hamilton, the noted man of letters, will agree that that was the first year of the Conservative Government, so I hope that I have got my base line right. Between 1979-85, pensioners' total net income in real terms rose by an average of 2·7 per cent. a year, wheras the net income of the rest of the population as a whole rose by 1·3 per cent. That shows how well targeted our assistance for pensioners has been.

Moreover, and even more significantly, pensioners' incomes rose some four times faster during this period than during 1974-79, so if a licence fee concession were needed, how much was it needed during that period 1974-79, when all those Labour Members, the spokesmen of the pensioners, sat supine on their backsides and did nothing about it?

I want to make clear what our policy towards this matter is. Our policy has an added advantage of being the persistent policy that has been pursued by every Government who have had to consider these matters.

Mrs. Clwyd: If the Minister is so proud of his Government's record on pensioners, can he explain why, during this week of cold weather, twice as many people have died in this country as in any other European country?

Mr. Mellor: That is empty emotionalism, which has no connection with the reality of provision in this country as against others. It is a spurious statistic. The hon. Lady should be ashamed of herself for reducing the debate to that level. I have made it clear that the Government are spending £400 million a year on heating allowances. The last Labour Government spent £90 million. The Government are offering emergency assistance on heating to deal with the cold weather. During the winter of discontent, which was the last hard winter in this country, the then Government did absolutely nothing.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone invited me to turn to the more central issues in the debate, and I shall now do so, having, I hope, made clear, without any Labour Member being able to challenge my statistics, the validity of our record towards the pensioners. I hope that we shall hear no more nonsense about the poverty of our record in that matter.

Our policy, like that of previous Labour Governments, has always been to provide the retirement pensioners and others with cash benefits without placing any restrictions on the way in which they might be spent by the recipients. It is not for the Government to determine how pensioners use their resources, by syphoning some off into exemptions from licence fees, which many can afford and others do not want. That is the basic standard principle that the Government adopt. *[Interruption.]* I appreciate how embarrassing this is for Labour Members who have come to the debate and intend to speak in it. They may find it less embarrassing to talk among themselves, but if they were to listen to as clear a statement as I can give of the essential reasons why this Government, and the previous Labour Government, refuse to introduce such a measure, their succeeding speeches in favour of the measure might command more attention and respect.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman might find that if he spoke with a little less arrogance he would get more attention from the Labour Benches. Although he is so keen to dismiss all that I have advocated, it is interesting to note that, even if one leaves aside the glaring anomaly whereby those in warden-controlled accommodation rightly pay 5p, the Pearce committee came to the conclusion that at least those on supplementary benefit

[Mr. Winnick]

should not have to pay the television licence fee. Why does he continue to tell us that all that we are putting forward today is a simple exercise in bribery when even the Peacock committee recognise some of the merit of what I am advocating.

Mr. Mellor: The Peacock committee made a much narrower proposal than the hon. Gentleman, which would have been subject to all the same anomalies affecting others, equally poor, who are not pensioners or who are immediately above the line. As I have said to the hon. Gentleman—but he refuses to come to terms with this and said nothing in his speech of 35 minutes about how this would be paid for—the Peacock committee advocated that it should be paid for by a £10 licence on car radios, which we thought both unenforceable and undesirable.

Our proposal is to keep sensible control over the licence fee and to ensure that there are easier methods of payment. We see that at the most practical way forward in assisting the pensioners. That is why my hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear what the Government intend to do about the licence fee. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) wants to speak later, why does he not listen to what I am saying instead of having a conversation across the Chamber? I listened to what the hon. Member for Walsall, North had to say. I hope that the hon. Member for Rhondda will extend the same courtesy to me.

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We do not wish to abuse the protocol of the House, but it is obvious that the Minister has not read Clause 3 of the Bill. Would it be in order if I were to walk across the Floor of the House and give him a copy of the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for me. There have so far been 22 interventions, when the hon. Member addressing the House has given way. There have been even more interventions from a sedentary position. This is a very important debate. Far more hon. Members who are waiting to catch my eye would have the opportunity to do so if there were fewer interruptions, particularly from a sedentary position.

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: Very well.

Mr. Rogers: I apologise to the Minister if I disturbed him when he was speaking, but, as I have already told the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), I would willingly listen to the Minister if he would come to the central point of his argument. When he stops ranting and raving I shall listen to him. If I have put him off I apologise. I shall now listen attentively to what he has to say.

Mr. Mellor: I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has announced a pattern of increase in the licence that is fair both to the BBC, but subjecting it to appropriate financial discipline, and to those, particularly the less well-off, who have to pay the licence fee. We are also conscious of the difficulty that many people of limited means, including many pensioners, face in meeting the cost of the colour television licence in a lump sum. For that reason we offer easy payment schemes to help people to spread the cost of their television licence.

The well-established TV licence savings stamp scheme is extremely popular, particularly with pensioners, many of whom are regular post office users. In the last financial year, stamp sales reached a record of nearly £160 million, which is equivalent to about 16 per cent. of the total licence revenue. We are aware that the present savings stamp and direct debit schemes do not help those who have been unable to save money for their licence fee and who are faced with the need to find the fee in full before they can be issued with a licence.

As a means of overcoming this problem, both we and the BBC see attractions in arrangements under which licences could be issued on a pay-as-you-go basis, perhaps in quarterly instalments. Therefore we are now considering with the BBC how such a scheme could be put into practice. I hope that that represents a further step forward in recognising appropriate ways to ensure that people are able to spread the cost of payment in a way that is sensible and that fits in with their budgeting arrangements.

Much has been said today about the concessionary scheme. I make no bones about the concessionary scheme, any more than did my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington) in his letter to his constituent. The concessionary scheme is riddled with anomalies. It emerged in the early 1950s; it was particularly modified in 1968 and 1969; it was further modified in 1978 and, to a limited degree, in 1984. The result is that 650,000 benefit from the concessionary scheme and the numbers are increasing by 2,000 to 3,000 a month. We believe, just as the previous Labour Government believed, that it would be quite wrong for us to withdraw that concession from all those people, because a concession once granted cannot, in the real world, readily be withdrawn. However, it is impossible to find a coherent basis for that scheme—

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish my sentence. It is impossible to find a coherent basis for that scheme, any more than it would be possible to find a cogent or coherent basis for the scheme that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Walsall, North. If the hon. Gentleman says that his scheme is less anomalous than the present scheme, I fear that he is sadly mistaken. We propose to continue the existing scheme on the basis that to do otherwise would be unacceptable.

Mr. Dixon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that a concession, once given, cannot be withdrawn. Will he explain why this Government have withdrawn 7,800 concessionary TV licences since 1979 from pensioners on South Tyneside?

Mr. Mellor: That has to do with local circumstances; it has nothing to do with the basic thrust of the argument. It relates to the basis upon which a local authority chooses to exercise its discretion.

I hope that I have established the Government's willingness to take sensible steps to ensure that the television licence is not an unforward imposition and that easy payment arrangements are made available for the less well-off.

The Bill of the hon. Member for Walsall, North is riddled with anomalies. They can be appropriately summed up in this way. He knows well that the concession he has presented to the House today would benefit many people who are well able to pay the licence fee but that it would exclude many who are below pensionable age who, in one way or another, are worse off than many pensioners —for example, single-parent families, the unemployed, young people away from home and the sick and the disabled living in accommodation that is not eligible for the 5p licence. He knows also that one third of pensioners are in the top three quintiles of national income and cannot be said to be impoverished. That is, 2·5 million people who would benefit from the hon. Gentleman's proposed concession. For that reason, not for any lack of concern about impoverished pensioners, we believe that assistance can be and must be better targeted.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to carry on for a moment.

The Bill fails to single out those who are in financial and social need—for example, because they are single and housebound and particularly dependent on television as a form of entertainment. The anomalies of this proposal go far beyond anything that, on any pious expectation, could be held out as capable of reform in Committee.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Member for Walsall, North were to concede that the Bill should be amended so that pensioners on supplementary benefit were included, and also those who are living on their own, does the Minister accept that the Bill ought to be given a Second Reading and sent to Committee?

Mr. Mellor: If the hon. Gentleman had had a little more patience, he would have seen that I am coming to precisely that point. One of the central reasons against the Bill is that once one begins to give concessions on television licences to pensioners, it is impossible to police them in a way that ensures that they do not ultimately become a concession for all.

Mr. Hughes: That is not true.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman says that that is not true. Perhaps he will wait and make his own speech. He has intervened once, and I should prefer him to develop that point later in his own way.

The proposals of the hon. Member for Walsall, North would cost £230 million. When a pensioner presents himself for that concession, how would we be able to determine, in practical terms, whether he was living in a pensioner-only household?

Mr. Ashton: The DHSS would tell the Minister.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman keeps saying that the DHSS would tell me. However, the DHSS has considered this proposal and says that there is no easy way of determining this issue. If he thinks that I am wrong about that, he can take it up with DHSS Ministers. That is their clear advice to me.

Mr. Ashton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I shall not give way again, even though the hon. Gentleman is such a devastating debater that I am sure that my reputation will be wholly ruined by not giving way to such an intervention.

Apart from the £230 million concession, which by itself is extremely expensive when ill-targeted and when at least a third of it would go to those who do not need it, the total cost of assistance to all pensioners households would be £330 million. That is the figure the Labour party is working on for its concession to all pensioners. But it goes further than that. Some pensioners have monochrome television licences. They will want free colour television licences. There is an evasion rate of 8·5 per cent. and one assumes that evasion is as common among pensioners as it is among others. Therefore many people who are not paying licence fees for their television sets will want free ones. There are other people who have no television sets and they will want them, if there is no licence fee. Therefore the total cost of this concession will be about £400 million. How is that to be paid for? The answer in clause 3 of the Bill is that the money will be paid by Parliament in addition to the annual grant. Opposition Members say that all we have to do is to dig into the money mine beneath this Chamber and Parliament will provide the £400 million. That is the economics of Star-style politics, but the money would have to come out of the pocket of the taxpayer.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I shall finish my argument and then I will give way. I am going to get stuck into the central point, which is the Labour party's total fudge, smudge and muddle on this issue. The hon. Member for Walsall, North comes forward with one concession. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr Kaufman), who speaks for the Opposition on these matters, comes forward with quite another concession to deal with all pensioners. Why there should be a difference between them I do not know.

Mr. Madden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: To pay for that would require additional taxation. What are we to learn from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr Hattersley)? He says that £3·6 billion is available from soaking the rich. He also says that all of that has already been spoken for for primary purposes and he has set out what those primary purposes are.

Mr. Madden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: Will the hon. Gentleman listen to the argument? When I have finished, if he can tell me why the Labour party is in such a muddle, I will listen to him. What the hon. Member is trying to do is to interrupt my speech so that I do not have the opportunity of getting this point across.

Mr. Madden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said:

"We do not propose to be side-tracked from our primary obligations."

[Interruption.] If Labour Members will not listen to me, they could at least listen to the right hon. Gentleman.

"The days have gone when we could hope to achieve all our ambitions in the lifetime of a single Parliament. It is necessary for us to fix our clear priorities and to insist that all other tasks and targets take second place."

[Mr. Mellor]

The Labour party is trying to con the pensioners that if it was in office it would give the pensioners this benefit just like that. The right hon. Member for Gorton, when giving the pledge, said:

"that pledge . . . will be a priority of the next Labour Government." —[*Official Report*, 20 November 1986, Vol. 105, c. 726.]

Mr. Madden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) must know that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Member for Gorton says that it will be a priority of the next Labour Government to give pensioners free television licences. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook says that he will spend only £3·6 billion, taken from the rich, and borrow £6 million purely for employment meaasures. He says that he will not be driven off course by other matters. What is the truth of it? Let the hon. Member for Bradford, West tell me.

Mr. Madden: The Government announced this week that they will spend another £230 million of taxpayers' money to subsidise Common Market food mountains, which are already costing the taxpayers £1,000 million. Why is it wrong to use taxpayers' money to give free television licences to the pensioners and right to subsidise food mountains, most of which are flogged off cheap to the Russians from time to time?

Mr. Mellor: The earth really has heaved and brought forth a mouse. I thought that the hon. Gentleman had something valid to say about how the electorate was to view the cynical promises of the Labour party, which is desperately trying to find some means of getting the support of the electorate.

The fact remains that Labour Back-Bench Members are vainly trying to sustain the quite impossible position that their Front Bench has got them into, because it is quite impossible to fund this change on any realistic view of what they are prepared to say. The only consequence would be the kind of increase in taxation that we had under the last Labour Government, the burden of which fell primarily on those who are paying the standard rate of tax, and which fell to a disproportionate degree on pensioners because the Government failed to raise the tax thresholds in line with inflation. It would be paid for out of the pensioners' own money.

Every Labour Government who have been asked to do this have refused to do so. The argument is quite plain. The money would come out of taxation, and a lot of those who could ill afford to pay it would have to pay for a concession given to those who are well able to pay for their licence.

As a classic example of the inability of the hon. Gentleman to think his proposal through, may I put out that he does not even advert to the reason why the BBC would be most loth to see this proposal go forward. The last thing that it wants is to be paid for its internal services through a direct Government convention. What does that say about the independence of the BBC? How will that stand when a Labour Chancellor next gets into trouble with the BBC?

Several Hon. Members rose

Mr. Mellor: I am not giving way any more; and it is no good the hon. Member for Walsall, North looking at his watch. When he reads what I have said, he will find plenty of things that he could, with advantage, have anticipated and answered in his own equally long speech.

The Opposition cannot raise this money without increasing taxation. They will try to lump it on to the rest of the licence payers and impose on the people of this country a licence fee of over £90 a year to justify their own promises.

This Bill is a cynical attempt to bribe people with their own money. It is not just bribery; it is an incompetent act of bribery, because the Opposition cannot even target it correctly, cost it correctly or fund it correctly. The pensioners know that they do better under this Government than the ever did under a Labour Government, and they will not be taken in by this sort of nonsense.

11.27 am

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on coming first in the ballot, and on putting forward such a sensible and long overdue proposal.

The Minister has had a bad day, because if his only tactic is to pour abuse on the Opposition, or to go back 10 or 15 years, the public will see that his arguments in opposing the Bill are weak. I will deal with a few of his points, although he went on at great length and other hon. Members want to contribute to this important debate.

Any pensioners who have been listening to the Government arguments will go away shaken, shocked and dismayed at the cynical disregard of their interests. Far too much of what the Minister and other Conservative Members have said was nothing to do with the pensioners and this Bill, but was an attempt to obscure the issue and to hide their embarrassment. Pensioners in this country are not fools; they know what is going on and they will come to their own conclusions.

I wish to comment on one point that the Minister made. On the question whether it was known how many people lived in pensioner households, he said that this information was not known, could not be known or was not available.

Mr. Mellor: Could not be checked.

Mr. Dubs: May I remind the Minister that his own Government are putting forward for Scotland and soon for the rest of this country proposals about a poll tax based on the need to know who lives in each household. He cannot have it both ways; either it will work for the Government's proposals—I object to them—or it will not. The Government must believe that it will work, otherwise why are the Government not arguing that the poll tax proposals should be adopted throughout the country?

Far too many pensioners today are poor, cold and isolated. We have talked a great deal about the need to keep pensioners warm in the cold weather. The Bill deals with one aspect of their poverty and with their isolation.

Let me remind the Minister of a point that was made earlier in an intervention. If the link that the Labour Government established between pensions and earnings had been maintained to this day, a single pensioner would be £8 a week better off and a pensioner couple more than

£12 a week better off. The very fact that that link was cut by the Government is one reason why so many pensioners are in poverty today and cannot meet their fuel bills and the television licence fee.

The Minister talked about fuel. Let me remind him of two specific facts. He was saying how well Tories have done by pensioners. Under the Labour Government there was a subsidy for pensioners and others in poverty to help them to meet their electricity bills. After the first £20 bill there was a 25 per cent. contribution towards the electricity bills of pensioners and other groups in poverty. That was done away with.

Let me also remind the Minister that we were charging pensioners and others for gas at cost price. What is happening now? In order to privatise industry, the Government have deliberately increased fuel prices in Britain, putting a further burden on pensioners and many others.

Mr. Mellor: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what has happened on electricity prices. London Electricity Board and other area boards have reduced their electricity prices for the past quarter and electricity prices for the past three years increased well below the rate of inflation. Under the Labour Government electricity prices increased by 2 per cent. every six weeks. That was the help that the pensioners received from the Labour Government.

Mr. Dubs: What the Minister is saying about electricity prices applies only to the past three years. What about since 1979 when the Government took over? The fact is that the Labour Government's support for pensioners and our ability to keep gas prices low cannot be challenged by the Minister, because he knows that it is the truth.

I do not want to spend time arguing with the Minister. He and I represent constituencies that are adjacent to each other in the same borough. Let me throw a challenge to him. Let him agree to debate with me in front of pensioners in Wandsworth all the arguments about the position of pensioners. I challenge him to agree to such a debate. We shall have it in Wandsworth and we shall see what the pensioners of Wandsworth make of our respective arguments.

The Home Secretary made a statement in the House two days ago on the licence fee and indexation. He said that in April 1988 the licence fee would go up by £2, but would also be indexed, making in all an increase of £5 next year on every household in Britain. That would also have to be borne by pensioners. No wonder the Government are embarrassed by the Bill. No wonder they are in difficulty. They are saying that there will be another swingeing increase on all people, including pensioners paying the licence fee, and we are saying that pensioners should be sheltered from that.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): The hon. Gentleman said that pensioners would see through any false arguments. Why did not the previous Labour Government introduce this measure when they had the chance to do so?

Mr. Dubs: We are dealing with the position of pensioners now. It is no good Conservative Members going back 10, 15 or 20 years. We are talking about the extra burden that has been thrown on pensioners by the Government and what will be done to help them. So far, the Government have come up with no answers.

Indeed, it is an open secret that, in order to vote the Bill down, the Government are to bring in the payroll vote. The hundred or so Members of Parliament on the Government payroll will come in later this morning to try to help the Government out of this difficulty and their embarrassment.

Mr. Mellor: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman once again. He is obviously embarrassed to be reminded of the Labour Government's record, so let me ask a categoric question about the future plans of a Labour Government. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has proposals which, apparently, can be costed on a £3·6 billion increase in tax on the rich. He has already come out with £5·6 billion of expenditure which does not include free television licences. Therefore, where do television licences stand in the order for the Opposition? When will they do it and how will they pay for it?

Mr. Dubs: We should not be making cheap debating points. No amount of laughter from the Minister and his colleagues will disguise that. We have made a commitment that the next Labour Government will phase in the abolition of the licence fee for pensioners. [HON. MEMBERS: "Phase in?"] Phasing in means doing it over a period of years, and that commitment is there.

Mr. Mellor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dubs: No, I shall not. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way in a moment. We are discussing today not what Governments did 10 or 15 years ago but the Bill that is before the House. Because the Government have no answer to the Bill, they are seeking to obscure the issue. Today is a private Members' day and I am making the Front Bench contribution in support of the Bill.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is keen to debate in Wandsworth, but he does not seem so keen to engage in debate in the House. Over what period of years will the pledge be carried through. When will it be done? How will it be paid for? Why is not it in the urgent programme of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook, (Mr. Hattersley)? Why, if it is not in that programme, did the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) say that it was a priority? What priority? Tell us in clear terms——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already made a long speech. Many hon. Members are waiting to catch my eye, so we should get on with the debate.

Mr. Dubs: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall not give way to any more interventions.

If the House passes the Bill today, and I hope that it will, and if it makes rapid progress before the next election, which will produce a Labour Government, the Labour party's policy will be well on the way to being implemented, and the Minister knows that.

Mr. Mellor: Answer the question.

Mr. Dubs: If the Minister will allow me to continue——

Mr. Mellor: Answer the question. The hon. Gentleman will not answer.

Mr. Dubs: The Minister has made no response to the Bill today. Shouting abuse is no substitute for argument. The House and the Minister know that.

Mr. Mellor: Just answer the question.

Mr. Dubs: Let me proceed, if I may.
One or two hon. Members have rightly——

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman will not answer.

Mr. Dubs: —talked about anomalies in the present system. They have talked about the 5p anomaly——

Mr. Mellor: When will he do it?

Mr. Dubs: —from which some people in sheltered housing and others benefit. I remind the Minister that in Wandsworth——

Mr. Mellor: Remind me when it will be done.

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister on the Treasury Bench, after a disgraceful and lengthy speech, to sit there and abuse——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not in order for any hon. Member to make a running commentary from a sedentary position.

Mr. Dubs: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Other hon. Members have rightly said that some pensioners benefit from the 5p concession while others do not. In a block of flats in my constituency, the first two floors are sheltered housing and the pensioners there benefit from the 5p concession. On the higher floors where the flats are identical, pensioners in almost the same situation as those in the flats below but who do not have the warden support, have to pay the full licence fee. If ever there was an example of unfairness, that is it. We should extend the concession to all, or go further, as the Bill suggests, rather than say, as did the Minister of State, that that would make the situation more absurd. The hon. Gentleman said that in an intervention. It seems that we are being unfair to pensioners and that we must bring the offence to an end.

We all know that the licence fee is regressive. It bears heavily on those who are least able to pay, and the bulk of pensioners are in that group. Bus passes are an example of an attempt to help those who are least able to pay, and I do not object to the fact that all those of pensionable age receive bus passes. There are some who may not need a pass—indeed, there are those who could well afford to do without one. The Prime Minister is eligible for a bus pass, and I shall not object to her having one to use to travel from Dulwich after the next election as long as pensioners generally can benefit from this travel concession.

We have in the BBC, despite all of the criticisms that are made of it, the finest example of public service broadcasting in the world. The BBC has set high standards and the IBA has had to emulate them. It is right and proper, therefore, that access to television as a medium of entertainment, news and information should be available to all our people. I do not want the poor, and above all pensioners who are lonely, isolated and more dependent on television than anyone else for information and entertainment, to be denied the chance of having television in their homes.

The burden is heavy on pensioners and if the licence fee increases it will become heavier still. The Bill is an important step in easing the burden on pensioners and it will be seen as such by all. I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

11.42 am

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): When I first arrived in the House about eight years ago I made a severe mistake, according to the Chief Whip. I felt occasionally that I had to stick by my principles and vote against the Government. That happened occasionally but not very often. Lo and behold, the issues on which I rebelled when I first entered the House became the subject of changes of policy on the Government's part and my policies became Government policies. This led to the Civil Service being deprived of the benefit of my experience. If it is any encouragement to the Bill's supporters, they shall have my support today. In taking this action I am being extremely fair because one of the Bill's sponsors is the very man who led the opposition mounted against me during the week that saw the consideration of another Bill. I believe, however, in doing what I consider to be fair and right. Enough of my own advertisements.

Since my arrival in this place I have endeavoured, through successive Home Secretaries and the Director General of the BBC, by tabling questions and by my efforts as a member of the all-party pensioners group, to try to secure a fair and just system of concessionary television licences for all pensioners. There are some who say that those who take my position want a concession that will extend across the board and that millionaires and the rich generally will receive the same concession as everyone else. What is so terribly wrong about that? Millionaires receive tax avoidance advice, but, by and large, they pay much more tax per head than anyone else. I am concerned about the pensioner who is not in receipt of handouts and who does not receive benefits. Some of them say to me, "Mr. Dickens——

Mr. Tony Banks: They would, of course.

Mr. Dickens: Indeed. They told me, "I am considered to be too rich to apply for benefits but in truth I am too poor to keep paying ever-increasing costs and prices." These people are caught in a trap. As I have said, what is wrong is the licence fee concession being extended to everyone? We all pay tax, including Members of Parliament. Indeed, hon. Members pay more tax than the chap on the shop floor, and rightly so because, generally, we earn more money.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dickens: I shall do so in a moment.

My remarks about taxation reflect the Conservative party's philosophy. We know that the Labour party, including the Opposition, wants always to support the deprived, and quite rightly so. Conservatives take the same view. We all want to support the struggling families but the difference between parties is that the Labour party wants always to squeeze the rich or the wealthy. In this instance we have an opportunity to say that the licence fee concession will not be given only to those in receipt of benefit and that we have in mind the mother with a young family, the sick and disabled. God willing, all those who come within those categories will be pensioners one day.

Mr. Holt: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dickens: I had better do so now. I note that my hon. Friend is becoming rather fidgety.

Mr. Holt: That is because my hon. Friend is being so stupid. My hon. Friend has suggested that Members of Parliament are subject to higher taxation than many others. I suggest that he considers the earnings of those who work in television. He should acquaint himself with the earnings of the ITV blue-collar workers and the tax that they are paying on earnings of over £100,000 a year.

Mr. Dickens: That is right. I am aware also that some of those who host quiz shows are paid £250,000 for doing so. I wonder sometimes whether the financing of the media is out of step with other areas of the community.

I do not think that the Opposition have a snowball's chance in hell of securing the Bill's Second Reading——

Mr. Frank Cook: Not with you, Geoffrey.

Mr. Dickens: —but I shall try to help the Opposition resist the closure. We all know what it is like in the House on a Friday. The Government claim that there are defects in a proposed piece of legislation and that more should be done to improve various parts of it and the supporters of the Bill say that the Bill can be improved in Committee. That has been said by many hon. Members this morning. That is all very well, but last Christmas I attended a party that was arranged for disabled people of all ages. They asked me to try to make arrangements for them to have a warden because they felt vulnerable. I made the necessary arrangements during the year and, with the help of the local council, a warden was obtained. When I went to these disabled people's Christmas dinner this year they thanked me for their free television licence. When I asked them what they meant they said, "Dont't you realise that because you arranged for us to have a warden, we can now enjoy the concessionary licence?" I felt that it was a pity that they had to talk to me in those terms. The present system puts one pensioner against another.

When a pensioner talks to a friend in a shop, for example, he might find that his friend pays nothing for his television licence while he has to go to his jar and take out the few coppers that he has put together to pay for his licence. That is unfair and unjust.

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): My hon. Friend has said that in many instances one pensioner is put against another. Does he not consider that the Bill would do that?

Mr. Dickens: Perhaps I have missed something in the Bill, but I do not see how it does that. If every pensioner——

Mr. Holt: The Bill does not apply to every pensioner. Read the Bill.

Mr. Dickens: That is not what I was told by the sponsors in the Corridor. We should be treating pensioners alike, and I am sure that the Bill's supporters would accept amendments to that effect.

In this instance I feel that the Government have been extremely slow. This is my eighth year in the House, and from the moment that I stepped into the place I tried to secure a fair system for all pensioners. The present system is disgraceful and the Government, rightly so, are unwilling to take away concessionary licences from those who are in warden-controlled accommodation because that would be politically unpopular. Secondly, there is a hotch-potch of other pensioners who are left out of the concessionary arrangements; and they feel that they are being treated unfairly. It would be better to move towards a funding arrangement for the BBC that would be fairer for everyone.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has made a passionate plea on behalf of the Government. In doing so, he drew attention to the many things that the Conservative party has done to help pensioners over many years. I agree with that, and I am still proud to be a member of the Conservative party. I continue to support it day in and day out. I think, however, that we are failing to concentrate our minds on the Bill. Surely we should be fair to all pensioners. I think that we have slipped up on this occasion. I should like to see a different arrangement for the funding of the BBC. In that way we might secure a fair deal. Even if the Bill fails today, it will have fired a warning shot across the nation's bows. It will show that there are right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who are quite able and willing to think of a different method. We shall have to think a little more constructively.

It is always better if proposals come from the Government because they then have much more chance of success. I urge the Government to consider deeply the arguments that have been advanced today because we are not being fair to all pensioners.

11.50 am

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) made a surprising speech. I thought that he would get up and hang all pensioners. I welcome what he said and look forward to seeing him in the Division Lobby.

This is an important debate. We should acknowledge that many pensioners are listening to us in the Strangers Gallery. They will report to their organisations what has been said.

The debate goes much further than television licences. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on his success in the ballot and on the way in which he introduced the Bill. He has provided us with an opportunity to highlight yet again the problems that face pensioners. We have already seen and heard of their difficulties this week because of the weather. They have arisen basically because pensioners lack money. The Bill is being introduced for the same basic reason. If pensioners were better off—which is what we want—there would perhaps be no need for private Members' Bills.

My hon. Friend and Member for Walsall, North mentioned a letter that he had received from a lady in the Isle of Wight who said how difficult she found it to raise the money for her television licence. It is all very well for the Minister to say—when I could catch what he said between his bouts of temper—that pensioners can get stamps, but it is often difficult for them to find the money to buy a stamp each week.

Mr. Madden: Or to find a post office sometimes.

Ms. Richardson: Indeed, they sometimes have difficulty waiting in the queue, especially in present weather conditions. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North epitomised pensioners' dilemma when they try to secure the lifeline of a television set. Television is company in the home and makes their lives a little fuller.

All pensioners have difficulties, but women pensioners will be especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Member

[Ms. Richardson]

for Walsall, North. Some two thirds of the 9·6 million retired people in Britain are women, and just over 6 million of the 9·3 million people who draw state pensions are women. At all ages, more women than men are single, widowed or divorced and the older the age group, the more marked that trend becomes, thus increasing the chances that women will live alone.

The 1981 census showed that almost 13 per cent. of women over 80 were married and that 87 per cent. were widowed, single or divorced. We all know that women often survive longer than their husbands, and therefore live in isolation. Only one third of retired women receive a full basic state pension. They are somewhat worse off than their male counterparts and deserve special consideration.

Some 2·4 million women have lower pensions than men, including some 1·5 million women who have to wait until their husbands retire to qualify for the lower dependent wife rate of pension. Fewer women qualify under occupational pension schemes.

We have a high population of pensioners in Barking. I am sure that others will claim the same for their constituencies. Some 13·8 per cent. of the male population is retired as compared with 12·1 per cent. in the rest of the country, and 25·4 per cent. of the female population are pensioners as compared with 22·9 per cent. in the rest of Great Britain.

Those figures show that we are an aging population. We should be proud of that. Too often, the media and the Government regard pensioners as a drag. They are not. We should be proud of them and the fact that we have a National Health Service which has enabled pensioners to live longer and better lives than was possible only 20 years ago.

The prospects for women under the present Government are poor. They have suffered from the difficulties of managing on their pensions and they have suffered because the Government have attacked local authorities and prevented them from providing extra sheltered accommodation which, inter alia, would have enabled pensioners to have a much cheaper television licence.

When I go home from here at night—I live alone—the first thing I do is switch on the television, provided that it is not after midnight. It is not that I necessarily wish to watch anything—I do it because I need the company of voices in my flat. Television and radio, but especially television because of the moving pictures, are a vital part of a pensioner's life. Television is not a luxury or even just entertainment. It is a lifeline and a link. It enables people to feel that they do not live in isolation but as part of the community.

We should regard television as an essential part of people's lives and ensure that when people whose life and work we value reach retirement, they are given the benefit of free television licences as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North proposes.

11.58 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on being fortunate enough to gain first place in the ballot. I am sure that this is an important issue to which we should give serious consideration.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) made a fair point when she emphasised that television is not simply a means of communication or entertainment. For a great many people, especially the elderly and those who have to live alone, it can mean much more. The issue is clearly important.

For people who are on low incomes, £58 is a significant amount of money and the Bill is important if for no other reason than that. It has to be said, however, that whether we consider the cost of the limited proposals in the Bill, at £230 million, or of the only system which, if we follow the general principle of the Bill, is ever likely to work—£320 or £330 million—we are talking of a significant sum.

If the issue is important socially, economically and in terms of pensioners' incomes, my first priority is to try to assess under three important headings what attitude I ought to take to the proposals in the Bill.

First, is the principle in the Bill a fair one? Is it a desirable proposition and can it be justified on the grounds of social equity? Secondly, if the amount involved is hundreds of millions—£230 million or £330 million or whatever the figure may be—is that the right way in which this Government or any other Government ought to spend that sort of public money? Is that an area of public expenditure that we ought to regard as a priority?

Thirdly, as previous Labour Ministers have always asked, and as has been asked by this Government: where is the £320 million to come from, because clearly it will not spring out of thin air? It is necessary to examine those three essential principles if we are to take the Bill seriously. Let us look at them in reverse order.

Mr. Leadbitter: The hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting point about the global sum. I apologise for intervening if the hon. Gentleman proposes to develop that and come to the conclusion that I am about to put to him. Is he aware that for pensioners living by themselves — or for two or three pensioners living in the same household — the money required in terms of basic income tax would be 0·2p, or one fifth of a penny?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right to point that out and he is also right to suggest that I might want to develop that approach to the totality of public spending. The point I was coming to is that every proposition is examined on the basis that its cost will be one third or one fifth of a penny or such an amount. Of course that is right.

I have not spent many years in this House, but I spent many more years on a local authority on which one heard exactly parallel arguments. The arguments were always, "Let us have just a little bit more of this." People used to say that we should have a little bit more of this or that desirable item and that the cost would only be 0·5p or perhaps one tenth of a penny on the rates. In all deference to the hon. Gentleman's experience, I have to tell him that that argument is simply not sustainable; it is a genuine argument of absurdity, a reductio ad absurdum.

People go on and on saying that this or that extra benefit will only mean another one tenth or one quarter of a penny on income tax, but that is not a sustainable argument. An Opposition hon. Member said that the £320 million could be found if there was a will to find it. He said that where there is a will there is a way, but the economic wellbeing of a nation cannot be sustained by that argument.

One of the most distressing experiences that many of us in local government ever had was to find out, after the

IMF had come here to try to instil some basic economics into the Labour Government of 1974-79, that that Government had no sympathy whatever with that argument. It was advanced by those of us in local government who were pleading with the then Chancellor and the then Secretary of State for the Environment for absolutely vital funds that we needed for a whole range of services that we wanted to offer to our ratepayers. The then Chancellor and the Secretary of State for the Environment told us in extraordinarily pious terms that we had to recognise that money did not grow on trees or come out of thin air, and that every one tenth of a penny simply added to previous one tenths. We can develop that argument, but it does not need much exposition by me. I believe that the vast majority of people have always accepted that.

There is, of course, an alternative, which is to develop a point made by the hon. Member for Walsall, North. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who made a very pertinent speech, was in error in only one respect when he said that the hon. Gentleman had not advanced a mechanism for paying for his proposal apart from saying that the Government would pay. The hon. Gentleman clearly said that if the investment income surcharge were reintroduced it would easily provide the necessary amount. That is a seductive argument for people to advance, particularly the Opposition. It is the view that the rich get the pleasure and the poor get the blame. No doubt that happens, but the problem is that there are many other ways in which that money will be spent by successive labour spokesmen who have committed successful Departments to expenditures which vastly exceed the £3 billion or so available by extra taxation of the rich and which do not begin to deal with the totality of the Opposition's promises of which this proposal is one.

A significant question mark remains over the Bill about whether the £320 million is available.

I should like to advance an argument especially for the Opposition. I never fail to credit all hon. Members with the same concern for their fellow citizens and desire to ensure their well-being. If the Opposition had £230 million or £320 million in their hands, would they honestly be sure of their ground in view of the fact that central heating would be installed in 115,000 old people's homes, for the cost of a free television licence.

Mr. Frank Cook: Either/or.

Mr. Norris: That is an interesting proposition, because it begs the assumption that, if it is not "either/or", it is "as well as". The hon. Gentleman clearly is not listening to me or to all sensible people. Every housewife knows, when she goes into a supermarket, that all expenditure decisions are either/or decisions. I hope that the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) will forgive me—I do not want to detain the House because other hon. Members want to speak—but this is exactly a matter of either/or. The failure to recognise that all the expenditure decisions which we take in the House are either/or decisions flaws the Opposition's argument.

Mr. Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point, but I shall give way.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to explain what I meant. Either/or can mean either tax cuts for the rich or provision for those on low incomes who need assistance.

Mr. Norris: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. The balance between the rate of taxation levied and the amount of money spent by any Government on behalf of any section of the community is the essence of politics. I do not seek to evade that point. I have already said that it is rather facile merely to assume that every desirable extra expenditure in the community is simply to be paid for by an almost limitless ability of those who create wealth. That example is, therefore, not especially convincing.

I suspect that the hon. Member for Stockton, North knows that this is an either/or question. If I had the luxury of distributing £320 million, I should like to distribute it in a way that would assist old people. I should like to provide central heating for 160,000 old people's homes each year and insulation schemes for one third of a million pensioners every year. That is what we could do with this amount, which would provide a facility which, by common consent, including that of the hon. Member for Wallsall, North, is not even necessary to a large number of people to whom it is directed.

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*—

Mr. Norris: I shall not give way because I do not have much time and many other hon. Members wish to speak.

I advance only one other option. I hear many arguments about the plight of local authorities when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment addresses the House. Opposition Members talk about the difficulty that local authorities have in supporting the services that they wish to provide. What if we could distribute about £300 million to the 300 local authorities in Britain, including the district authorities? Each would have about £1 million to spend as it wished —although in some cases not as I would wish. If there was such an alternative, in all conscience, I could not support this measure. There are many more obvious ways in which the money could be spent.

The irony is that my 30-year-old disabled constituent would be ineligible for the benefit while my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), would both enjoy it. With the greatest respect to both of them, I doubt whether they are in the desperate need that would require the attention of the House under this measure. On the contrary, there is no logic in the way in which the proposal is advanced and certainly no logic for deciding that age alone shall be the criterion for such largesse.

The present arrangements should be developed. First, we should allow people to pay more easily and, secondly, we should extend the concessionary category. I recognise that there are anomalies and that there is sometimes resentment about the way in which the system can apply arbitrarily as between the top three floors of a tower block which contain unsupervised old persons' accommodation and the bottom three floors which contain supervised accommodation. The Government must examine the matter. I welcome the indexing of the fee, which will ensure that more value for money is enshrined in future levies for the service that we receive.

[Mr. Norris]

As a slight note of caution to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I should say that I entirely accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan). As the proliferation of options offered by television expands, it will become less and less easy to argue that two of those channels should demand an impost from taxpayers. My hon. Friend mentioned a figure of 50 channels. That is what might have been said of the growth of literature several hundred years ago. I suspect that there will be several hundred options before he and I are much older. We must consider the licence fee on a different basis.

But that does not cut across the basic premise of the Bill. In essence, the hon. Member for Walsall, North says that, if the House had the choice of spending £320 million and if it wished to spend that money to alleviate the plight of elderly people, it should do so in a way that all previous Labour as well as Conservative Governments have rejected as being inequitable, inefficient and of far lower priority than many other matters.

For that concrete and unanswerable reason—it has not been answered by anything that I have heard today—I shall be unable to support the Bill. I have already advised those of my constituents who sent me their slips from *The Star* that although I applaud their good intentions, they are misguided as to the appropriateness of this expenditure.

12.14 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): During the course of this morning Conservative Members deviated for some time, possibly without intention, or possibly in the course of developing their arguments, by embarking upon giving the House a tutorial on the past. The fact of the matter is that the Bill essentially deals with the present.

I think that we should make it abundantly clear that when we are debating—as we did for a short period this morning—hon. Members should bear in mind that it does not impress the country or pensioners if hon. Members embark upon a tutorial on the past. They have spent time asking who did what and when, or who did not do what and when.

Mr. Forth: Surely it is legitimate to invite the electorate to compare the words and aspirations expressed on the one hand by any political party with the most recent evidence of what was done by that party when in Government. Surely it is perfectly legitimate to invite that comparison.

Mr. Leadbitter: The state of legitimacy is lost in the state of illegitimacy.

This is a private Member's Bill and, as I said earlier to the House, the essence of the Bill has already been brought before the House in different Bills on five previous occasions. Therefore, hon. Members should not seek to bore the nation with a repetition of past arguments.

I do not think that there is any hon. Member who has been in the House for a long time who could honestly claim that he or she has never had a change of mind on a problem when circumstance have changed. The country and old-age pensioners are asking their elected Members to confine their remarks to this issue. The electorate want to know whether there is a problem, is it morally correct to deal with it, and can we have the resources to do so? The answer to the first question is yes, and the answer to the second is certainly. However, there is a lack of political will.

I find it rather odd, given that this is a private Member's Bill—and rather out of character—that the Minister spent so much time this morning—rather more than anyone else—making party political points. I came down from the north of England for this debate and I did not want to be told that the Bill should be put into a strait jacket because of the stupidities of official party policy of whatever colour. Perhaps that is why the Front Bench was at a loss to say very much. It has no business with the Bill, as it is a private Member's Bill.

The contribution made by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) was objective and fair. He posed certain questions—one should do this or do that. He conceded that we should also consider the issue. His contribution certainly impressed the House, because he did not embark upon a futile puerile exercise—a tutorial on the past.

We heard from one hon. Member this morning who is so rich that he could afford to have a golden television set. He had the cheek and temerity to say that there were one or two niggardly things that should be put right, but he does not have the guts to come into the Lobby with us. If I may give a word of advice, it is that those who are extremely well off should show some common decency and shut up.

Mr. Waller: As the hon. Gentleman is looking at me, I can only assume that he is referring to me. I imagine that my income as a Member of Parliament is similar to his, because I am a full-time Member of Parliament and have no other form of income.

Mr. Leadbitter: I shall leave that point, as hon. Members are fully aware of what I was saying, but the hon. Gentleman might at least have been less hard on the poorer sections of our community, given that he is living in luxury of a sort that very few people in this country can even dream of.

Five private Members' Bills have been introduced on this subject. The official policy of previous Administrations has been that they want to give the pensioners the cash and let them spend it as they like, saying that there is free choice, but that is the damndest cheek that I have ever heard. Administrations anyway have no business in deciding how people spend their money and should not say that in the context of claiming to be about to give people cash. Pensioners never seem to get the cash anyway. Does the House not understand that we are dealing with people who have already contributed to the wealth of the country? They have worked for the wealth of the country, and the things that we now enjoy are the work of past generations. If we cannot play the game today by our old people, how the hell can we play the game by ourselves?

The Minister's speech fell far short of what was required. That may have been out of character and due to an exuberant desire to set the political format for his Prime Minister, or even for his own self-survival. As someone said to me a little earlier, there may anyway be a question mark over his survival after that speech.

The House must try to understand that it is not a question of either this or that, or of as well as. There are sufficient anomalies in the allocation of resources for us

to raise great moral questions about the rightness of our actions. For example, we spend billions of pounds on the Common Market, and as a result the Russians are happy in their abundance of butter. Millions of pounds are spent on missile equipment which will before long be out of date. Billions of pounds have been committed to cruise and Pershing. One contract alone has now run over £800 million, with another £900 million contracted to be spent.

We must look at our total resource allocation and ask ourselves whether we have got the balance of our priorities right, so that we can deal properly with welfare, health and education. I believe that the answer to that question is no. What we see now is a condemnation of years of neglect. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is trying for the sixth time in nearly six years to get a Bill enacted. The House needs only to have the will for the legislation before us to become a reality. The House needs only to say that hon. Members will be free to examine the Bill in Committee.

I am a senior Committee Chairman of the House and I have dealt with many Bills. One of the great merits of the House is that where one side of the House disapproves of a Bill completely in principle, it votes against it. It is not a question of what is arguable about voting against a Bill where the whole principle is involved, because the total principle of the Bill invites opposition in that sense.

The other great merit of the House is that, where a Bill has within it the core of a principle, it is allowed to go to a Standing Committee so that it can be improved. The principle can be either widened or contracted within the judgments of our capacity to meet those considerations.

I have refrained from referring to the Allen and Peacock reports. All that is there for hon. Members to read. I have refrained from making any sort of statistical analysis or financial judgments, except to say that the global amount can be met by one fifth of a penny. Notice that I said that during an intervention earlier. It will cost one fifth of a penny rate on the basic level of taxation. It is a damned sight less for those who are rich and on the highest income tax scales. Therefore, I have put aside all the detailed paraphernalia and sought to deal with the general principle, which is, that there is a consensus in the hearts and minds of men and women that there is a core of rightness and moral acceptability in the Bill. If there are any doubts about the Bill's practicality and about the consequences of its total implementation, for God's sake, for once, show a lead to the country: show that we in the House are going in the direction and meaning of sense and not responding to what has been decided in Downing street or a Department of State.

If the payroll vote is brought in this morning, members of which will not have heard one tittle of this debate, to walk into the No Lobby and defeat this sensible Bill and refuse to give it a chance to be heard, that will be wrong. If I may say so, if the Bill is taken under the genuine, generous, likeable chairmanship of the hon. Member for Hartlepool, we will not fall short. I plead with the House to give the Bill a chance to be heard. It needs to be shaped, so that it is acceptable to the will of the House. Then everyone in Britain, not only old-age pensioners, will feel that for once we have got rid of petty, party, political nonsense and used a little bit of sense in the national interest.

12.27 pm

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) made an emotional and interesting speech. It echoes the entire mood of Labour Members' speeches today. The entire purpose of the Bill is emotional. It is a sort of "East Enders" with a Greek chorus now assembled behind the mover. It is a media exercise.

Instead of applying our hearts to the Bill — and I have applied my heart to this Bill perhaps rather more than Labour Members realise — we should understand that old-age pensioners want television and find it extremely hard to pay for it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give them it."] I am also thinking of the old-age pensioner who lives with his adult son and wife who are out of work. They will not qualify under the Bill for a free licence. [HON. MEMBERS: "Change it, then."] That is why I intervened earlier in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) to say that the Bill would achieve what the present anomalies regarding residential care achieve, which is to set pensioner against pensioner. It only worsens the situation; it solves nothing.

The facts and the intellectual argument are admirably expressed in a piece of research that I have not heard mentioned today. In 1968 the television licence was £10 a year, and the basic pension for a single pensioner was £4.50 increasing to £5. In those days a pensioner with no savings would have had to spend more than two weeks of his pension on a television licence. Today the basic single pension is £58 a week. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, that is the cost of the licence. I misread my notes. [*Laughter.*] I have always been bad at reading notes and that rubs the point in. [*Interruption.*] I shall wait for the Greek chorus to subside.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Give him his cue cards again, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Brinton: Today the basic old-age pension is £38.70 and the licence for a colour set is £58. That means that today a pensioner pays for his licence with one and a half weeks of his pension, not two weeks.

Mr. Winnick: That is all right.

Mr. Brinton: That is not all right. What is all wrong is to suggest to pensioners, whom I know and who have savings, this Labour totem of all pensioners being without savings. That myth has been exposed today. Therefore, we must consider what we are talking about.

Mr. Skinner: Think of a punch line and finish.

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before you took the Chair this morning, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) interjected on a point of order and asked for sedentary intervention to be stopped. Your predecessor in the Chair rose to that request and stopped them. Will you do the same, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I have noticed during the few moments that I have been in the Chair that there has been a certain amount of noise coming from both sides of the House. I hope that we shall listen to what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Brinton: I wish to turn to the other side of these proposals, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Brinton]

Minister at the end of his speech. What would be the effect of the proposals, if the Bill were passed and a sizeable proportion of the BBC's money came via the Government? That was laughed at today and, apparently, hon. Members believe that it would not matter if the Government could say yea or nay about what happens to the BBC. There was even more raucous laughter when the word "independence" was mentioned in connection with the BBC. Every right hon. and hon. Member should defend the independence of the BBC. That does not stop us criticising the BBC, but the Government were to get hold of the money that is paid to our domestic BBC services, that independence would be at risk.

Mr. Winnick: I may do the hon. Gentleman an injustice, but it is interesting to note that he did not defend the BBC when it was under fierce onslaught from the chairman of the Conservative party. My Bill does not basically change the financing of the corporation; it will continue to be financed by the licence fee. All that would happen is that the shortfall, resulting fom the extension of free licences to pensioner households, would be made up by the Exchequer. The Bill does not change the financial relationship between the BBC and the Government.

Mr. Brinton: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the chairman of our party was entitled, as is any other citizen or organisation, to criticise the BBC, and he left the matter for the governors to decide. On the second point, the moment the Exchequer has to hand out money, it will decide how much to hand out. That happened in the last Labour Government, in the matter of the pensioner earnings equivalent in the rise of pensions. It happened in the case of the pensioners' Christmas bonus. There is no guarantee, if the money is to be handed out by the Exchequer, that there will be a constant flow of equivalents.

The Bill, if one casts aside the emotion and looks intellectually at what it means, will continue to set pensioner against pensioner. It will not improve the lot of any of those pensioners' children, because I do not believe that arrangements can be made to pay this through taxes. Therefore, the television licence for the sons and daughters of those receiving free licences will go up by £30 a year. I could not recommend the Bill to go to committee for consideration because it is a mass of anomalies that does not achieve its set purpose.

12.36 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The shortest speeches today have been no less effective than the longest, and I hope that mine will be both short and effective. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) has more knowledge of television than I. He may agree with me when I say that I would have had more regard for the argument about the independence of the BBC if it had been put 10 years ago than I do now, after the performance by the chairman of the Conservative party and other recent revelations.

I have been against this anomaly since before I entered the House in the 1970s. When the concession was first introduced I welcomed it but percieved the difficulty and distress that it would cause, because often people who enjoyed the concession were in better condition than those who did not enjoy it, as happens now. Since then, I have been involved in the various initiatives to secure an improvement. I mutedly welcomed the partial improvement introduced by the Labour Government in the 1970s, but it did not go far enough.

My local authority is a good one and has a splendid record of providing accommodation for the elderly. Because it has done so, a larger than average number of people in my constituency — this applies to other parts of south Yorkshire — enjoy the concession. That means that those who do not enjoy it feel even more strongly about it because they know more and more people who do.

Three or four years ago I raised in the House a relevant illustration when I spoke about two widows in Rawmarsh, both of the same age, lifelong friends and both in identical circumstances in that both were widows of miners. One lived in a ground floor flat and the other lived in the flat above. The one in the ground floor flat had the 5p television licence, but her friend in the same circumstances had to pay the full licence. That was absurd, as it continues to be.

My local authority recognised the absurdity and maintained to all pensioner households not qualifying for the concession a grant equivalent to the monochrome licence. Unfortunately, the harsh rate-capping retrenchment and the Government's attitudes and policies towards local authority spending meant that last year the local authority had to choose whether to maintain the home help service or the television grant. It decided that it could not afford to maintain the television grant. That renewed its support for this Bill. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) had the good fortune to draw first place and I know that thousands in south Yorkshire are deeply thankful for the Bill.

In the metropolitan borough of Rotherham there are 19,000 pensioner households. The council's grant was not paid to 13,000 pensioner households. Therefore 5,000 pensioner households in Rotherham enjoy national concession. That presents a sufficient number of anomalies to make it imperative for the concession to be extended to the other 13,000 pensioner households. It means that 4,500 people in my constituency are denied the concession, whereas 2,000 other people obtain it. Some of the 4,500 who are denied the concession are in greater need than some of those who enjoy it. The Minister can no longer defend this anomaly.

On Wednesday, the Home Secretary more or less challenged my hon. Friends to deploy arguments that would convince the Government that our case is just. He could have shown his face in today's debate. However, I accept that the Minister of State has sat assiduously throughout the debate. I hope that he understands that the populist voice, that may well have been expressed by his hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), is very extensively supported. The arguments that have been deployed by my hon. Friends ought to be heeded. there may be a case for considering refinements to the Bill in Committee, but if this Government use ministerial muscle to defeat a Bill with a long pedigree and a great deal of justice behind it, it will do them no good. The ordinary people of this country know that the City of London has enjoyed great support from this Government. Through big bang and other arrangements, in association with the City of London, the Government have allowed young men to earn salaries that are in excess of six figures a year for running

about chasing money in the City of London. That gives some idea of the priorities of the Conservative party. We are approaching a general election. I cannot imagine that the Government have so little sense that they will let this matter lead to them losing the many seats that they deserve to lose.

12.42 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I am glad that the Minister spelt out some of the benefits that have accrued to pensioners during the lifetime of this Government. I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on being first in the private Members' ballot. One of the features of this debate is that many hon. Members have referred to the defects of the Bill. A Bill with defects is less likely to make progress than one that has been carefully thought out, in consultation with various bodies.

Television plays a very large part in the life of a pensioner, as do many other things. Some might say that its importance is not to be welcomed, that pensioners do not seek enjoyment elsewhere, where through comradeship and friendships they are encouraged to get out of their homes and participate in worthwhile activities. Nevertheless, the licence fee is a heavy burden for pensioners of limited means. It is regrettable that we lump together all pensioners and describe them as having to cope with financial difficulties. Many pensioners provide throughout their working lives for their retirement. They are proud of the fact that, having contributed to private pension schemes, they are able to draw on funds, that enable them to live well in their old age.

We should be guided by the principle that people ought to be encouraged to save for their retirement. The more that the Government do to give concessions and handouts for those who, at present are retired, the less the incentive is for those who are in the middle span of their life to save and make arrangements to secure their financial viability in retirement.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman, in opposing my Bill, unlike the Minister, is putting forward a coherent and logical argument, although I strongly disagree with it. Does the hon. Gentleman understand that what he has just said is hardly consistent with the Government's policy? The hon. Gentleman says that people should save. Leaving aside the problems that so many people have in saving —those on low incomes in their working lives, and so on—does he not realise that no one, even though he may be on supplementary benefit, can receive the extra £5 a week if he has more than £500 saved? People who save are being penalised.

Mr. Banks: People who wish to save would be penalised by taxation. Taxation is geared to the Government's requirements to fund various schemes, one of which would be concessionary television licences if this Bill went through.

Other anomalies would appear if the Bill were to be enacted. There would be a conflict between pensioners, and this has been brought out in the debate. Under the Bill as it stands, the concessions would go only to pensioner households; that is to say, both people living as a husband and wife in a household would have to be of pensionable age. Therefore, there would be a gap—given that there are gaps between the age of a husband and that of a wife —before the qualification applied. Similarly, those pensioners who have a minor living with them would also qualify. One could expound the argument that somebody who is handicapped, but who is not a minor, should not disqualify the concession.

Another anomaly, when we are talking about a colour television licence, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North has pointed out, is that 1 million people have black and white television licences. Those with black and white licences would feel disadvantaged by the fact that they do not have a colour television set, and thus qualify only for the lower payment.

Above all, there has been a lack of mention in this debate of the family assisting pensioners. Some sons and daughters of pensioners are prepared to give support. Many people accept that responsibility and are delighted to give that support to their parents in their old age if their parents are hard up and unable to meet their commitments.

Above all, my quibble with the Bill is that many people, through taxation, would have to pay the amount of money that would be necessary. Some of those people are less well off than those who would receive the concession. There are many people living on low wages who have heavy commitments, with young children to support, who would find that if their taxation were increased, even by a small amount, it would have an effect on their family budget.

My criticism of the Bill is that it does not select those who are most in need of help. It gives a broad concession to too many people who are themselves able to find the funds for the licences.

12.48 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): There are many flaws in the arguments of the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks). Of course, children support their parents as and when they can; that always has been the case. But perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to say what he would do about the 24 per cent. who are unemployed in my constituency. Were they able to work to support their parents, they would gladly do so. They probably do so on the pittance that they receive while unemployed.

The Bill deals purely with pensioner households. That excludes those households with non-pensioners who are capable of paying a television licence fee. However, the hon. Gentleman had a point when he referred to a household consisting of two old-age pensioners of different ages, the husband aged 60 and the wife aged 65. That would create an anomaly, but it could be considered in Committee. All we are asking is that the Bill should be considered in Committee.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on introducing the Bill and on his position in the ballot which enabled him to do so. Many Labour Members would have chosen such a Bill had we been fortunate enough to be first in the ballot.

The Bill will be appreciated by millions of people outside the House. I am sure that all hon. Members have received a tremendous amount of correspondence on this subject. That shows how many people are willing the House to let the Bill go forward and, at least, to look at it.

It has been said that television is changing, and that is right. That is why we have the Bill. Had television remained the same, I am sure that we would not be having

[Mr. Allen McKay]

this debate. There would not have been the same pressures from outside. We have not reached the end of its development. It is only a step in the direction in which television is going.

Cable television will give a choice of 25, 30 or 40 channels with different ideas and attitudes. For example, cable television may televise the House on a 24-hour basis so that people can switch on and off as they wish. That will stop the prima donnas coming in when proceedings are being televised. The same applies to our Committee proceedings upstairs.

Gradually, the part played by the BBC will become less and less as the number of channels and the opportunities of television increase. This is but a step, but it is a step that is needed and we should be wrong if we did not allow the Bill to be thoroughly examined in Committee.

I raised this issue in 1978 when I first entered the House. Therefore, I cannot be accused of being a member of the previous Labour Government. I took up the debate from my predecessor, John Jacob Mendelson. When I came here after the by-election in 1978, there two matters on my desk. One concerned television licences and the other the Stockbridge bypass. That bypass has now been built, and I hope that this matter will reach a similarly successful conclusion.

In 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 I have presented ten-minute Bills. The one in 1982 went to a vote, and it was accepted by 187 votes to nil. That was a clear expression of the will of Parliament at that time, and, I think, the will of both sides of the House, on an important issue. I hope that today Conservative Members will continue to show their support of the Bill by coming into the Lobby with us and making a positive move to putting the Bill in Committee. That will be appreciated not only by pensioners but by many other people outside the House.

The Government had a chance this week to do something and failed. The Secretary of State presented to the House his proposals on television licensing for the next few years. He had a chance at that time to say that something should be done about concessionary licence fees. But, as usual, he ignored the millions of pensioners. As usual, the argument was that we could not afford it. A long time ago one of my lecturers on industrial relations told me that the right response was to say, "It will not work" when finding oneself on the losing side of an argument. Instead of saying, "It will not work", Governments say, "We cannot find the money" or "The Bill is defective". The Secretary of State for the Environment would be in terrible trouble if he relied on the Bill-is-defective argument. Next week we shall be debating a Bill that the right hon. Gentleman had to introduce because the measure which preceded it was defective. He has been involved in at least five court actions because of the enactment of defective Bills. Any Government would be in trouble in relying on the defective Bill argument because they introduce defective measures which they then have to remedy.

When I was in local government I was always puzzled when considering where the money would come from to fund whatever project was before the council. At central Government level, the money was suddenly found to enable Britain to fight the Falklands war. The money was there when we wanted it. The Government found the money to defeat the miners' strike. It was there when the Government wanted it. The found the money also to enable them to give tax rebates to many who could have done without them. The Government say that the money is not available in this instance because they do not want the Bill. That is why they have advanced a negative argument to try to kill the Bill on Second Reading.

I agree with those who say that the best approach is to have a retirement pension that is high enough to make concessions unnecessary. Can any hon. Member say when a pension of that sort will be paid, especially when the Government removed the link between pensions, price increases and wage increases, pensions being linked to whatever was the higher? Every move towards the introduction of concessions has been killed by the Government.

Many local authorities recognised that there were anomalies and tried to remove them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) has said, local government expenditure cuts have forced local authorities to withdraw concessions. We can hope only that they will be restored. What provision was made by local government? I have the 1984-85 figures that set out the concessions that local government provided regionally. There were 145 in the northern region, 12,555 in Yorkshire and Humberside, six in the north-western region, 276 in the east Midlands, 440 in London, north and 3,234 in London itself. The figures show that the spread was unequal. Of the 12,555 concessions provided in Yorkshire and Humberside, 11,518 were in one local authority. It is clear that local government cannot take up that which central Government does not provide.

Many hon. Members have talked about anomalies, and we are all aware of them I shall give one example. In a block of flats the units on the lower floor were designated as old persons' dwellings while the ones above were not. In one instance a 60-year-old lady living on the downstairs floor received a free television licence while her 80-year-old mother, who lived upstairs, did not. That is an example of the quirks and anomalies that are brought about by the present system.

Mr. Leadbitter: We are living in an imperfect world and there will always be anomalies. Anomalies raise problems and in dealing with problems we are presented with new opportunities. Anomalies provide no excuse for inaction.

Mr. McKay: My hon. Friend is right. I shall always remember being told that problems exist for us to overcome them, and that in so doing we make way for the new problems that will inevitably come along. The same can be said of anomalies. When we remove one set of anomalies, it will be replaced by another, and so the process continues.

Many pensioners are debarred from the present national system because of their accommodation. This often happens when pensioners are living in the same position and in the same way as those who receive concessionary licences. As has been said, the number of people involved is increasing. In 1979, when I started on the campaign for concessionary television licences, 400,000 people received a concession. That figure is now 635,000. That leaves some 4·8 million people who do not receive any concession, although they are in the same way. Many people believe that that is wrong and unequal.

Some people ask how we will raise the money. It has been suggested that the money could be spent on this or

something else. That would be a fairer argument if the choice was between this or something else, but it is a choice between this and nothing. We have heard that the money could be used to instal central heating in 150,000 houses, but it is not that the money will be used for that if we do not have oncessionary television licences. We are merely being presented with a notional choice. The Government will not turn the Bill down to save money which will be given in some other form. They have already cut local government funding.

Some 2·9 million pensioners live alone and another 1·9 million are in couples. We are talking of 4·8 million people. The concession would cost only 0·2p on the basic rate of income tax. Would anybody quibble at 0·2p?

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Mr. McKay: The hon. Gentleman is well heeled. I bet him that the majority of people do not think or feel like him, they think of people who are less fortunate than themselves. The cost could be borne by putting 0·4 per cent. on value added tax. There could be a combination of the two, and we could increase the 5p licence.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the rise in income tax or VAT should be in addition to the £28 billion that the Labour party has already pledged?

Mr. McKay: I am not the future Chancellor of the Exhequer. When we are discussing billions of pounds, is the hon. Gentleman trying to tell me that one fifth of a penny will wreck the bank for millions of people?

Mr. Ottaway: I am suggesting that it is not just 0·2p of additional income tax—the Opposition are suggesting £28 billion-worth of increased taxes.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is not true.

Mr. McKay: I do not think that we have suggesed that. We have only suggested possible means of raising the money. The hon. Gentleman probably does not like that, but that is why he is not on this side of the House. Conservative Members should stop making spurious arguments. Is the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) telling me that the British people will not support old-age pensioners to the tune of one fifth of a penny? If he is, he is wrong because the British people are more creditworthy than him and they think more kindly about old people.

The hon. Gentleman will get old one day. Whether he is fortunate or unfortunate depends to some extent on the House, which should ensure that people are treated equally. If the hon. Gentleman does not vote in favour of the Bill, he will be voting for inequality, and that is what the House is not about.

1.5 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): The television set is the porthole through which many of our constituents see the outside world—those constituents who, perhaps, can see only through that porthole because they are not able to go up on deck, let alone go ashore and move about like the rest of us. Basically for that reason alone I shall go into the Lobby and say, "Let us take this Bill a little further and see what we can do with it."

It is sad that we have had so much yah-booing from all sides, but my hon. Friend the Minister spoke truly when he told of how much the Government and the Conservative party have done for the old. Equally, the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), the mover of the Bill, spoke truly when he said that we care for the elderly and the pensioners. I accept all that, but this is a discriminatory Bill and that aspect must be changed.

We must not discriminate on any ground against any person, and age is one of the grounds which is not in itself reasonable discrimination. Let us consider the housebound, who may well not be pensioners, the sick, the crippled and the disabled. Those people are not necessarily pensioners, and if we are to make things fair, amendments of considerable substance are required. These would have to be made so that the Bill could be seen as fair by the Committee and would be fair as an Act.

I do not doubt for a second that the hon. Member for Walsall, North would accept our agreement on the good and caring things that he said, but it was perhaps sad that he tied those in with too many barbs and comments, as if those on the Government side had no humanity and that only his hon. Friends who were yah-ing and booing had some sort of monopoly on the good thoughts in life. That is not so and all hon. Members know that.

I spoke about discrimination, and many Members have mentioned anomalies. If we go through the Bill clause by clause, we see that the first obvious anomaly, about which so many hon. Members have spoken, is like that in Woodville close in my constituency.

One group of people pay 5p for each television licence and people on precisely the same income living on the next floor in the same building pay the full rate. Of course this must be changed. No Government can say that it would not be fair to wipe out this anomaly.

Perhaps the one thing that a private Member's Bill can do is clear up anomalies, even though it cannot change the vast policies of state. I have listened with interest but not great enjoyment to the House going through a sort of budgetary process. But this is a private Member's Bill and not part of the budgetary process of Parliament nor indeed part of the policy of any party in Parliament. It deals with a matter about which hon. Members in all parts of the House feel strongly. Although we may take different routes we all want to reach the same goal and there is no need to be ashamed of choosing a different route.

If the Bill goes forward I shall be happy to serve on the Committee and see how many can clear things up and make them more logical. There is no point in saying that age alone should be the only criterion. Age may be the beginning of a qualification, but those who are housebound must have equal access to the benefits of the box. I entirely understand those who talk about the BBC versus independent broadcasting and advocate various forms of funding. That is not what we are discussing. We are discussing whether it is right that those who are disadvantaged should be helped to at least some form of parity in their viewing of the outside world, into which some of them cannot go.

Mention has been made of widows. It is easy to ring the withers of Parliament by picking out the hard cases. Yet even in peaceful north Devon I know young widows who do not like to go out at night, not because of the violence that one finds in capital cities, but simply because ladies on their own prefer not to go wandering alone. If they, too, are on a limited income, are they not equally entitled to this TV benefit? For these very much wider reasons than the reasons in the Bill we should at least give it a try.

[Mr. Tony Speller]

One thing that nobody has mentioned except in an unkind way is the hotel system of paying for television. Please do not turn me against the Bill, as hon. Members couldeasily do, by talking about the prosperity of people running hotels. Hon. Members who come from constituencies where trade is seasonal will know that hotels may be empty for six months of the year and that the approximately £25 licence fee that each hotel pays per set is a fair if not excessive sum. I can see no logic at all in the argument that to help somebody we should soak somebody else. That somebody else may well be oneself wearing another hat or on another journey.

The Peacock report said that there should be no advertising, but I do not agree. I believe that pensioners and young people would understand the logic of such an approach to Radio 1, which my family calls "Radio Plonk". It broadcasts pop programmes, that are quite good for those who like that sort of thing. If there were advertising on Radio 1, which I believe has the largest listening audience of all the stations, it would not make a pennyworth of difference to its appeal but it would make many pennyworths of difference if that revenue was then allocated to pensioners' viewing fees.

Young people like to look after the old and the disadvantaged. We should look for ways of finding the money without imposing a burden on taxpayers generally. I am not seeking to destroy public radio or television, but it is a strange anomaly that while it is somehow ethical for the BBC to sell programmes and the music from various serials and to advertise these widely, it is apparently not ethical to put advertising on a Radio 1 programme and thereby provide pennies for pensioners' TV pictures.

Mr. Ottaway: My hon. Friend will, of course, recall that the Peacock committee rejected advertising because it did not think the market was big enough to sustain two channels competing for one lot of advertising. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had a chance to look at a report in *The Times* today which says that the IBA will consider increasing the amount of advertising on the independent channels because there is insufficient time at present to take the demand. The article states:

"The formula has resulted in a growing shortage of slots for commercials".

This seems to show that there is scope to reconsider the Peacock report's recommendations.

Mr. Speller: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I did not read *The Times* this morning, as the *Western Morning News* is far more important from north Devon's point of view.

In a previous incarnation I was a shopkeeper, and the argument of every shopkeeper against an out-of-town shopping market or against granting planning permission for a rival to be built is that there is not enough business to go around. Frankly, the Peacock committee's recommendation is not acceptable as an argument against more advertising on television any more than that view is an argument for stopping someone setting up in business next to me on the high street selling drawing boards. I believe that there is plenty of advertising money about, provided good advertising is aimed at those who are likely to buy the products advertised. That is why I mentioned Radio 1.

The Bill is imperfect, but, as we are all aware, perfection is a rarity outside this Chamber, and sometimes inside it. I believe that many of the clauses must be changed substantially. As the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) said, that is the purpose of a Committee. If the Bill is not passed this Session, shall we again try next Session, the Session after and so on for ever? There is always a good argument for inertia. Inertia, allied to cost, is the greatest deterrent of all. I should have thought that it is worth trying to carry on this Bill and I note that my equally well-built hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) will also support further consideration. I do not know whether I shall be able to support the Committee's decisions, but let us take the Bill at least that far and see whether we can make it workable, fair and equitable to those for whom the licence fee is not equitable at present.

1.13 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): It is a great pleasure to speak in support of this Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). All hon. Members, irrespective of the side of the House on which they sit and their constituencies, represent retired people. There is no doubt that the Bill has wide public support which is by no means confined to retired people who see the possibility of benefiting from it. It extends to people of all ages who appreciate its benefits.

I am a member of the all-party pensioners group, which has discussed the issue many times. Delegations from all areas come to meet us and to talk about matters that worry them, and this issue is almost always on the agenda. For a long time, many people have wanted developments in this area. Today we have a chance to do something.

I have listened to every speech in the debate and I am confused by the repeated mention of well-off pensioners. I could not describe the pensioners who come to my advice surgeries or whom I meet when I visit day centres or luncheon clubs as well-off. There may be well-off pensioners in some areas, but they do not live in my part of south London. However, I often meet pensioners who tell me, "Because of the system and because I receive a few shillings a week over the limit, there are many benefits I do not receive." Pensioners tell me repeatedly about their difficulties in managing week after week. All hon. Members, irrespective of party, should want a system in which, once pensioners have paid their bills, they have some money left in their pockets to spend as they wish. Very few of them have more than a few shillings left after they have paid their bills. If the Bill were given a fair wind, it could help many people.

To Members of Parliament and to many many members of the general public, the licence fee of £58 may not be a large sum, but there is no doubt that it is a very sizeable sum to the vast majority of pensioners. We tend to forget the problems facing the overwhelming majority of pensioners who live on limited incomes.

Another issue that is often mentioned in the House but on which we make no meaningful progress is standing charges. Pensioners must pay standing charges on electricity and gas—we now have standing charges on water—telephone rentals, VAT on the bills, and the television licence fee of £58 a year. Pensioners on limited incomes are being asked to pay about £200 a year in charges even before they use any services, so the removal of the £58 licence fee would be of great benefit to them.

A frequent argument in the House is, "It is a good idea and we should do it, but it would be too complex to introduce." I reject that argument in this case. Some hon. Members have mentioned bus passes. I served on the Committee that considered the Bill to set up London Regional Transport. A major issue there was bus passes. We were told that it would be complex to provide bus passes. They were retained only because of the efforts made by the Greater London council to ensure that the bus pass system that it had introduced and which was so warmly welcomed by the people of London could continue. The argument that it would be too complex to continue the scheme evaporated when it became obvious that the people of London would fight to retain the system. Thankfully, it has been retained. It is no good hon. Members saying, "It is a good idea but far too complex." It is not. It needs the willingness of Parliament to allow my hon. Friend's Bill to go into Committee. That is the correct procedure and that is how legislation, Government or private Members' legislation, comes on to the statute book. A Bill goes into Committee where it is discussed and amendments are tabled. The House should provide that opportunity for my hon. Friend's Bill.

We have heard much about the cost of this Bill. I totally reject those arguments. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) referred to what it would cost on the standard rate of tax—a fifth of 1p. We have heard that there may be a reduction in income tax and that is greatly resented by those we are trying to help today. The Chancellor has said that he hopes to find X number of billion pounds for his April Budget. As it is expected that this will be an election year, we know that the Chancellor will be able to find very substantial sums of money. There will be substantial tax cut give-aways, but how will pensioners benefit from that? If there are tax cuts announced in this year's Budget the vast majority of pensioners will receive nothing at all.

Today Conservative Members have been objecting to the expenditure of something in the region of £200 million. However, those same hon. Members will be shouting their heads off on Budget day when the Chancellor announces give-away tax concessions worth millions of pounds. That is what annoys so many of the less well off sections of our community. Tory Members complain about the cost of this Bill while at the same time warmly supporting any tax concessions. The Bill should have the opportunity to go into Committee, where it can be thoroughly discussed.

I would support the introduction of a decent indexed pension scheme — my wish is shared by many hon. Members and the vast majority of pensioners. If we had a system of that kind the measure that my hon. Friend is seeking to introduce would not have the same degree of urgency, and problems with regard to heating payments would be eased.

On Tuesday the Government showed concern for people facing enormous problems because of the atrocious weather. In view of the Minister's remarks and those of other Conservative Members it is worth recalling that one of the great problems that many pensioners find in keeping warm, not only during exceptionally bad spells but throughout the winter, is the size of the bill that they have to meet either for gas or electricity.

That problem has been exacerbated by the Government's policies that have forced an enormous increase in the price of gas and electricity. That makes it difficult for many people to afford to keep themselves warm. The Government showed a degree of concern on Tuesday—no more than that—but it would appear that my hon. Friend's worthwhile Bill will not be receiving any sympathy.

If the Bill is not given its Second Reading today, pensioners and their families will know just how much the Government care. Today can be seen as a test of the Government's concern. On Tuesday they were forced to act because of the atrocious weather, but apart from that, they are not prepared to show any urgency. The test is whether the Government will give the Bill an opportunity to be debated in Committee.

In half an hour or so Conservative Members on the payroll vote may stream into the Chamber although they have not taken part in the debate or even listened to any of the speeches. If they come in to kill the Bill, it will be an utter disgrace. Government legislation and, more particularly, private Members' legislation is entitled to be given a fair wind so that it can be debated in Committee. I warmly support this Bill, and I sincerely hope that we can debate it in Committee.

1.26 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I can certainly take up some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), even if I cannot agree with his conclusions. He made one important point, which is that we are really talking about the proper expenditure of public money. On occasion that theme has been spotted during the debate, but most of the time it has not been. We are discussing the right way of spending public money.

When my hon. Friend the Minister set out the Labour Government's record on pensions, he did not suggest, any more than I would, that the manoeuvres that the Labour Government had to resort to stemmed from any lack of compassion or concern for the elderly. There was no doubt about that at all, but, confronted with the realities of office, they suddenly found that the rhetoric of compassion was not, in itself, enough. That led them into some pretty devious byways which certain Opposition Members found somewhat distressing.

I shall not go through all that now, as it has already been referred to at some length. However, it is worth mentioning the manoeuvring that had to be done to get out of the earnings link that that Labour Government had introduced, and the manoeuvrings that were done from a historic to a forecasting method. That is what happened when the Labour Government had to find the money to care for the poor. Perhaps that was best summed up in a pamphlet that explained to the public how an electricity discount scheme would work. On the Government's behalf, it explained whey they could not do as much as they would have liked, and stated:

"the Government has only limited funds available to help people."

In a way, that says it all. All Governments have only limited funds available to help people.

When the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) popped in for a few brief moments to speak, I put it to him that I was somewhat puzzled by the fact that I could not find in the 1979 alliance manifesto one word about approaching the problem of caring for pensioners by making such concessions. The hon. Gentleman said, "Ah, I know what the answer to that is. The answer is that

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

circumstances change." He may rue the day that he did it, but he then picked up my word flexible and said that we had to be flexible and that times changed.

Times may change in the sense that one has to consider the way in which one wants to achieve one's policies, and one must accept that sometimes one has to change one's mind about how to go about it, but the laws of economic reality have not changed since 1978 or 1979. The Bill effectively advocates a blanket subsidy, and that is what the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South was talking about. The laws of economics do not change simply because a party which used to be in government goes into opposition.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South, who I know will wish to read *Hansard* to see what other contributions were made, may well turn his mind to what was said by the founder of his own party, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) when he was the Labour Home Secretary. He said:

"Successive Administrations have taken the view that it is preferable to help pensioners and disabled people with cash benefits rather than to give benefits in kind. I do not think it would be possible to justify the increased public expenditure which a Government subsidy would involve."

Times may change, but the laws of handout economics do not. The right hon. Gentleman took that line at that time, so to that extent nothing changes.

Mr. Simon Hughes: It is still the alliance's position that a decent pension is by far the best way of helping people of pensionable age. In 1979, when the Labour Government, who had been supported by the Liberals, went out of office, the link between earnings, a decent graduated pension and the pensioners' entitlement was dropped. If the Government were to re-adopt that link there would not be so much pressure for the Bill, because more pensioners could afford what they are entitled to, which is to have a television in their old age.

Mr. Nicholls: I appreciate that because of the hon. Gentleman's responsibilities he may have other calls upon his time, but he may feel in due course that he perhaps missed something from this debate by not being present when my hon. Friend the Minister was talking about precisely that point. The hon. Gentleman talks about the earnings link. Yes, the Government whom his party kept in office produced an earnings link, but in three out of the four years in which it should have applied they avoided their own legislation.

The Secretary of State for Social Services at that time was chided by *Pensioners Voice* for his machinations on the pension. He said:

"There is a statutory obligation to take these figures . . . into account . . . but no statutory obligation to get it right."

Those were the steps to which the Government whom he supported were reduced.

The hon. Gentleman may also care to recall that pensioners were so displeased by the Government whom his party kept in office that on one somewhat inglorious occasion the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), a Social Security Minister in that Government, had to be rescued from Central Hall, Westminster from baying hordes of pensioners who wished to tell him directly how they felt about the pension record of the Government whom he supported.

I am sorry to have to say to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that, if he is to claim any support for the Government whom he formerly kept in office, he should think more carefully in the free moments available to him of that Government's record. He may also care to look back, as I do frequently, at a manifesto on which he was quite content to fight the last election, and notice that there is not one word among the many hundreds of words in it on how the issuing of a free television licence to all pensioners had become a necessary human right which would have to be funded. The hon. Gentleman will have to learn to live with that.

Much mention has been made of the anomalies which would result if the Bill, or anything remotely like it which could emerge from Committee, were to be passed by the House today. It has been suggested that anomalies are just a fact of life and that we must put up with them. We must go further than that. We are entitled to say to pensioners, when assessing the promises made by a party today and comparing those with how it dealt with the problem when in office, "Let us look at some of those anomalies."

What about the fact that about 35 per cent. of pensioners have an income above the national average? Is that really a proper expenditure of taxpayers' money to give free television licences to such people? That has been said before, but, unhappily, having listened to the speeches today, it needs to be said again. Does the right hon. Member for Leeds, east (Mr. Healey), the former Chancellor, need a free television licence? Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister really need one? I am bound to say that I do no think that she does.

Mr. Norris: Is it not an irony that on this side of the House we have always advocated means testing as the best way to determine who should be eligible for benefits, not because, as the Opposition allege, we are interested in feathering the pockets of the rich, but precisely because it ensures that those who do not need benefits do not receive them from the pockets of taxpayers who can ill afford to pay? Is it not a real irony that this proposal further ensures that the real beneficiaries of the Bill are those who have no need of this munificence?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend supplements his excellent speech with a valuable point. That is precisely the problem. When benefits are not targeted, anomalies arise. If the debate has shown nothing else, it will make hon. Members pause to wonder why they have worked so hard today to give the Prime Minister a free television licence.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): I have followed my hon. Friend's remarks with care. He may know that I represent a constituency which suffers from 24 per cent. male unemployment. Does he agree that the expressions of concern from Opposition Members about the unemployed would have a better ring if they suggested that those in genuine need, for example the unemployed, rather than many pensioners who are not in genuine need, were given free television licences?

Mr. Nicholls: I must commend my hon. Friend's eyesight and perspicacity, as the next point on my notes relates to the other poor. My hon. Friend makes an important point. If hon. Gentlemen are trying to means-target a benefit, saying that an unending diet of soap opera has become indispensable to human life and should be

funded by the state, they are failing, because other poor members of society, including poor pensioners, will not benefit from the Bill or anything remotely based on it.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman has just said that the Bill would have the effect of giving the Prime Minister a free television licence and that that was a reason why he argued against it. Surely that same argument could be applied to free bus passes? We understand that the right hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Sir K. Joseph) got himself a bus pass when he reached the qualifying date.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman has an engaging manner and he uses an old debating trick. On finding that he is in some embarrassment in talking about what he should be talking about, he talks about something else and hopes that he will not also be embarrassed by that. I am tempted to follow him down that particular byway and show him the error of his ways, but that is not fair use of the time of the House when others want to speak. Moreover, I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would call me to order if I tried to do so.

In addition to benefiting the elderly rich, the Bill would produce some strange reactions. I particularly enjoyed the moments of light relief when the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) was speaking. He swooped on my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) and accused him of being a millionaire, saying that my hon. Friend could afford a gold-plated television. The irony is twofold. First, if my hon. Friend is so gifted and fortunate, he must be paying huge amounts of tax to the Exchequer to fund benefits for those who need them.

Secondly, after that marvellous peroration from the hon. Member for Hartlepool about the evils of our opposition to the Bill and my wicked hon. Friend who has all that money, he said that when my hon. Friend, in the fullness of time, becomes a grey haired old millionaire in the twilight of his years, he wants to give my hon. Friend a free television licence. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to follow the logic of that. When one starts to try to dish out a blanket benefit because it seems like a good idea and the editorial policy of such distinguished newspapers as the *Daily Star* will offer support, one begins to travel down extremely odd paths.

I wish to deal with two further points, one of which has been a recurring theme in our debate. It is suggested that if only we could have a Socialist Government who would tax the rich, all this lovely money would be provided. Once again we hear that cry. The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson) said that if we could only screw the rich everything would be fine. That sounds fine. If we want to have a nice, straightforward, simplistic policy to produce Utopia on earth, we go back to the old musical song, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) reminded us, and reckon that it is the rich who are to blame.

One of the people from whom we have not heard today is the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I do not know where he is, but it may be that he suffers from embarrassment. In April last year he asked a written question of the Treasury to find out how much money the richest sections of society had paid since the Government cut their tax rates. We can perhaps guess why the hon. Gentleman asked that question. He thought that he would get a particular answer, but he did not. What he found out, and others could have told him the logic of this if he had troubled to ask, is that if we reduce the rates of taxation on the rich, they may work harder, earn more money and contribute more tax. That is not a statement from a Member of Parliament such as myself, who might be thought to be partisan. That is hard-core statistical and verifiable fact from the Treasury, which shows that if one cuts the tax rates of the rich, they wind up paying more.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): If the figures have escaped my hon. Friend, I can inform him that the top 5 per cent. of taxpayers contribute 26·4 per cent. of the total tax bill.

Mr. Nicholls: It is bound to be that way. If Labour Members are trying to work out why reducing tax rates on the rich helps those whom they say that they want to help, they should be able to understand that. Under the last Labour Government tax rates went up to 98 per cent., with the result that people did not bother to work, or did not go into the office after Thursday, so that they were not working just for the Government, or they left the country, or they took the money as perks, or simply gave up the ghost and stopped earning completely. If, under this Government, one can retain 40 per cent. of the money that one earns, there is a real incentive to earn more. It is difficult for Labour Members to get to grips with this, and it goes against the whole theory of the class warfare. If one wants money to help the poor, and if, like the last Labour Government, one realises that there is a limit to what one can do and one is in the business of generating money to help, one should be reducing tax rates on the rich, because more money will be generated in that way.

My second point is perhaps a small one, but it is worth dealing with it. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said that more people had died of hypothermia this winter here than in any other country. To use such figures in a numerical head count without relating it to the percentage that that would form the population is, while I would not say dishonest, an unhelpful and misleading use of figures. If the hon. Lady had wanted to follow that byline, she might have cared to reflect on the fact that the greatest number of winter deaths from hypothermia occurred in 1978-79. Labour Members constantly try to drop the blame for hypothermia at the Government's door, but they cannot do so. When I say that it was under the last Labour Government that hypothermia deaths peaked, I am in no way saying that that was a result of their lack of compassion. It is a simple fact of life that has to be faced.

As the debate has gone on and Labour Members have been made to face the Labour party's record in office and the arguments against the use of public expenditure in this way, they have tried to say that altering the Bill in Committee will take care of all the problems. When the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) was concluding his remarks, in a Churchillian parody, he came out with a line that I noted down because I could hardly believe my ears. He said that the Bill would help "pensioners on low incomes." That is precisely not what it will do in its entirety. It will help all pensioners in a thoroughly arbitrary way, whether they are rich or poor.

Mr. Winnick: Presumably the hon. Gentleman considers that I should have introduced a Bill to give further tax concessions to the rich. He says that, in its entirety, my Bill will not help those on low income. I accept that, but the overwhelming majority of pensioners who

[Mr. Winnick]

would receive the concession under my Bill are on low incomes — some 64 per cent., including those on supplementary benefit, with 40 per cent. above supplementary benefit level.

Mr. Nicholls: I remember the hon. Gentleman's speech very well. He redefined poverty so as to bring more people within it—a fairly usual tactic. The hon. Gentleman said that this measure would help pensioners on low incomes, but it will not. It takes a purely arbitrary class of pensioners, irrespective of their means, and applies help to them.

The hon. Gentleman ought to bear in mind that this Government have not given a single penny to the rich. They have allowed those who earn money, pay their taxes and turn the rhetoric of compassion into reality to keep more of what is rightfully theirs. To say that that amounts to a concession is like saying that a burglar has done one a favour in not nicking all one's possessions. To use that kind of language when referring to tax concessions will not work.

It is tempting to say that the hon. Member for Wallsall, North does not remember the record of his Government when they were in office and that he believes that this measure will help pensioners. Whatever else one may say about the hon. Gentleman, he has attended this debate assiduously, and I should like to think that he has done his research carefully. However, he can be in no doubt that if his party were ever again charged with the responsibilities of government—the realities that applied between 1974 and 1979 would apply again. It may appear to some of the most gullible and vulnerable sections of our society that he has their welfare at heart, but he has exploited their fears, and he may attract some votes thereby but I wonder whether, in the end, he will think that that was the best use of his fortune, upon which I congratulate him, in having obtained first place in the private Members' ballot.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House will be aware that at least five hon. Members who have been here since the beginning of the debate still wish to speak. Time is short, so I appeal for brief contributions.

1.47 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), whom I must thank. He displayed the most overbearing arrogance and unparalleled conceit. It was the most dangerous cocktail of class prejudice that one can possibly conceive. Now I understand what was said yesterday by the Leader of the House during business questions. He confessed that he would rather be known as a Tory ignoramus than as a member of the Tory intelligentsia. In last Wednesday's debate on severe weather payments and the plight of the pensioners I referred to my long-standing associate membership of the Teeside pensioners association. I make no apology for reminding the House in this debate of that personal commitment. Support of and involvement in such an organisation, dedicated as it is to the cause of improving the lot of the senior citizen and pursuing the beneficial development of their conditions in retirement, has always seemed to me to be just as natural an extension of my trades union activities as seeking better medical provision for my wife or an improved education system for my children. It is a further stage of development in the Christian quest to put to fairer and better use the country's common wealth.

Therefore, I take both pleasure and pride in asking the House to support the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). This eminently sensible proposal is long overdue. I take pleasure in devoting to that purpose the skills that I was encouraged to develop by fellow members and officers of the Teesside pensioners association. I refer to women like Elsie Stringer and Olwyn Gartland and to men like George Short and Syd Clay. My personal satisfaction stems in no small measure from the fact that my participation in today's debate means that I shall manage in some small way to repay the debt of gratitude that I owe to them and to many others of their age group for all that they have done to make this country great. That gratitude is something akin to the form of thankfulness that one feels for the patronage of caring parents. If all Members present in the House today can call to mind their personal statement of account on that particular element of life's currency, and examine closely their present balance, my hon. Friend must surely anticipate the outcome of today's debate with considerable optimism.

In that spirit of optimism, let us examine in finer detail the purpose of today's proposal and the reasons why we should seriously consider the adoption of such a scheme. We seek to enshrine in law a situation that allows the pensioner, either in single or married state, to be able to own and operate a television set free of the statutory requirement to obtain a licence. Why? The plain and simple answer to that plain and simple question is that it is grossly unfair not to. Let me explain and I will make it easier for the more myopic misers who would seek to obstruct this proposal.

If we look closely into the principle of the television licence, and the practical effect of compliance with its requirement, what is the fundamental problem that arises? Why do pensioners, those on social benefit payments and those on low incomes, view it with concern? They do so because they see the licence fee as a tax on households, and furthermore, as a form of tax that reacts most sharply against those held within these low income groups.

As it is pensioners that we are deliberating on today, let us ask ourselves what percentage of a pension our elderly are required to set aside to meet this iniquitous tax. If we take the weekly amount of a married couple, £61·95, or £3,200 per annum approximately, the portion of income absorbed is close to 2 per cent. annually. For the pensioner living singly and alone on £38·70 a week, that annual figure is £2,000, a portion of almost 3 per cent.

I thought of leaving it to the imagination of hon. Members present to assess the percentage for those on high incomes. I thought that an exhortation to such altruism might help to underline the inequality of this television tax. However, I thought again, and decided to render more assistance, because some hon. Members have been known to be somewhat slow when it comes to handling figures of a mathematical nature.

Having settled on the basis of the single viewer, calling on the net in hand income and using round figures, I offer this assessment to the House. The basic income of an hon. Member setting aside the magnificent additions of ministeral salary and the enhancement of junior post

payments and other payroll vote inducements of which we are likely to see evidence in about seven minutes, is, roughly speaking, £950 a month — say, £11,500 per annum. Expressed as a proportion of that modest sum, a television licence absorbs a mere 0·5 per cent., as opposed to the 3 per cent. demanded of the pensioner sitting shivering, pondering whether the long range Met forecasts will be accurate; or whether the temperature in four or five days will trip a point or two up on the Celsius scale; wondering whether to burn the extra log for fear that the magic minus 1·5 deg C felt in the bones is only recorded as minus 1·3 deg C at the national climatological message centre situated 50 miles away from his television set.

We heard a lot during Wednesday's debate about boneheads, so to make certain that all hon. Members present understand what I am saying, let me express it in another way: 0·5 per cent. of an annual income for an individual Member of this House, 3 per cent. for an individual pensioner — six times cheaper for the hon. Member, or if one prefers it, six times dearer for the senior citizen.

A phrase used frequently in this Chamber is "real terms". Let us have some real terms. Real terms on this scale means that, while an hon. Member may get a meal in the Dining Room for £5, the pensioner, on this basis, would have to pay £30. Dinner in the Strangers Dining Room would set the senior citizen back £48. A hearty grill in the Harcourt Room could mean a bill for the old folk of £70. The beer would be £6 a pint; the gin and tonic, £7 a tot; and the four star petrol to fuel their chauffeur-driven Rolls home could be bought for a mere £10·50 a gallon.

If one goes further and applies the same principle to the annual rate for the long-term unemployed, the percentage differential is eroded even further, reinforcing the argument that television licences should be phased out altogether as was proposed in the Labour party manifesto at the general election.

What sort of society have we created when old people who, by nature of their age and varying degrees of infirmity, are most dependent on television are to be punished, while those at the healthiest and wealthiest end can get away with what is, relatively speaking, a nominal charge.

A further cause of concern is the differentials between pensioners. If a pensioner lives in sheltered accommodation or in a ground floor flat connected to a warden system, he will pay 5p, but his neighbour upstairs with the same economic difficulties has to pay the full licence fee. Many hon. Members have referred to that, as they have, too, to the shabby differential which means that it is acceptable for hotels with dozens of bedrooms to get away with one television licence and yet to advertise "television in all rooms" as a means of touting for further business. As long as such differentials exist, which affect people on low incomes so severely, the seeds of discontent will be ever present.

I have referred to the percentage differences between the cost to a pensioner compared to the better-off sections of society in order to emphasise the criminal discrimination against those on low incomes. However, we cannot reduce the argument to percentages alone. When talking about the low incomes of our old people, we must understand that every penny of such income is spent on sustaining life, to such an extent that priorities such as food and clothing, or, in the present circumstances, heating, to combat the most severe weather, all have to be met. A television set is as essential to the elderly as the other things mentioned, bearing in mind that the lack of mobility imposes on the elderly the need to spend long periods in the home and alone.

To many old people the television set is their only contact with society and the outside world. It is criminal that in this rich society old people should be confronted with the choice of buying the necessities of life or purchasing a television licence.

I have tried to make a genuine case for the introduction of free television licences for the elderly. That plea from the heart must be seen in the context of a general decline in the living standards of the elderly. Since the pensions uprating link with earnings was broken in 1980, pensioners have lost considerable amounts of money from their weekly income and the relationship of the pension to the average wage has declined. That shows a serious aggravation in relative poverty. Heating allowances for new claimants were abolished in 1985 and the severe weather payment would appear a huge joke if it were not so tragic.

The Fowler legislation is set to erode standards still further. Inflation over the years has severely reduced the value of the Christmas bonus. The death grant, instead of being improved and brought up to a more realistic level, is to be abolished.

We often talk about senior citizens in a patronising way, knowing full well that the people about whom we are talking are second class citizens who struggle for their very survival. If we believe in the term "senior citizens", let us begin to bestow on our senior citizens the full rights and privileges that we associate with seniority. Much work is required to achieve such noble aims, but a start could be made by recognising the value of the television concession to the elderly. If there is a trace of humanity in the House, the Bill should be carried without dissent.

It is with pride and pleasure that I support the Bill and I appeal to all to let this mark the beginning of a process when we begin to recognise the true value of our old people.

I have had many clippings from *The Star*, clippings which I have not brought with me because I do not need them. The association of which I am a member has a membership approaching 2,000 and it keeps me well informed of their opinions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) referred to the 7,800 concessionary licences that were revoked by the Home Secretary in 1980. They were added to by the television licences that were revoked simultaneously in my constitutency. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow referred to Tyneside, but he did not refer to the campaign of Fred Jones. A pensioner of about 80 years of age is refusing to pay his television licence fee and is challenging the Government to send him to gaol for so doing. I say more power to his campaign. Fred Jones's campaign on Tyneside, the Teeside pensioners' campaign in Cleveland and the campaign that has been launched in *The State* today will ensure that the Division lists will be made available throughout the country. There are 9 million pensioners and many of them have children and grandchildren. When they read the Division lists, they will know where to put their cross at the next election.

2 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): When I read today's Order Paper I thought at first that good use had

[Mr. Eric Forth]

been made by Opposition Members of the opportunities that are presented by a private Member's Bill. I thought also that there might be an attempt to embarrass the Government. As the debate has unwound, however, it has become clear that anyone who reads a report of it will understand that it has exposed more about the Opposition's position than about that of the Government.

Opposition Members have protested about Conservative Members' constant references to the last period of Labour Government. They have done so because we have hit upon what is always a fundamental truth: judge someone by what he does or by what he did when he last had the chance to do something effective, and not necessarily by what he says. We have been told repeatedly by Opposition Members that we must not refer to what the Labour party did when it was last in Government. We have been told that that was ages ago and that it does not matter. We know, pensioners know and the entire electorate know that one of the best ways of judging what a Labour Government would do when in power is to examine what happened when a Labour Government were last in power. Despite all the promises, high-flown words and repeated claims of compassion that have come from Opposition Members, we know, and the pensioners know, that the promises made by the previous Labour Government were false and that those being made now will be equally false.

Why is that? Did the previous Labour Government manage the economy sufficiently effectively to deliver to those in need in society what had to be delivered? We know that the Labour Government failed to pay the Christmas bonus for two years. That Government failed to provide the concessions that Labour Members have suggested would be provided by a future Labour Government. We know that what Labour Members have talked about did not happen during the previous Labour Government's period in office and that it will not happen under a future Labour Administration. Even if it did, their mismanagement of the economy would be such that inflation would return and destroy the savings of the very people whom today Labour Members are claiming they wish to help.

We have nothing to fear from this attempt to embarrass the Government. It has given us an opportunity to draw attention to the failure of the previous Labour Government to deliver what they promised.

Why should the Opposition choose to give such special attention to television? If television is vital to life, as it has been claimed, why not talk about concessionary food or clothes? Why are Labour Members seeking by means of the Bill to remove from pensioners the right to choose how to use their resources, pensions or otherwise? Why should we deny to pensioners the right to say that they do not want a colour television and that they want to use their resources for another purpose? Why should we make the assumption that colour television is so overwhelmingly important to every pensioner that it is necessary to give them the treatment that is set out in the Bill? Those of pensionable age have as much right to exercise choice as anyone else and they do not need this patronising concession——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Would the hon. Gentleman go as far as to suggest that pensioners' bus passes should be withdrawn, or does he find some way of justifying those?

Mr. Forth: That is not the issue. We are not talking about bus passes. We are talking about an attempt to single out——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Answer the question.

Mr. Forth: I shall give the hon. Gentleman an answer if he wants one. I would judge travel to be a much more essential part of a pensioner's life than watching a colour television. If the hon. Gentleman wants my answer, that is it. I am much happier continuing to provide those of pensionable age with travel assistance, which I deem to be more necessary to them than colour television, than to take away their right to judge whether to have a television of any sort, a colour television or a black-and-white television. I respect that power of judgment and it is one that I wish to leave with them.

The other fallacy is that the indiscriminate giving of benefit is the best way in which to deal with problems. Opposition Members are prepared to take the scarce resources that are available to the Government and scatter them far and wide across society irrespective of whether people need help. Conservatives much prefer to identify people who are genuinely in need and give them as much assistance as possible. We do not want to give help, regardless of need, across the social spectrum. That is precisely the mistake which the Bill would make — yet again — and it is why I could level the charge of mismanagement against the Opposition.

No matter how often the Opposition repeat their claim to concern, when it comes to the acid test—whether that concern is translated into action — they fail on every count. They fail on the general count of mismanagement of the economy, as we have seen in the past, and they fail repeatedly because they are unprepared to single out those who are genuinely in need and direct assistance to them. The Opposition much prefer the bland and utterly ineffective approach of giving scarce resources that are raped from the taxpayer to anybody, regardless of need.

It has been observed several times today that one third of people of pensionable age are in the upper income groups, and presumably most of them would not wish to claim the proposed benefit.

The so-called campaign mounted by *The Star* has been referred to often today. Opposition Members have said that it carries some value or strength. Putting in a coupon which can be cut out and which purports to offer something for nothing gives people an easy opportunity to express their view that they would like something for nothing, all for the cost of a stamp. I confess that, from my electorate of about 77,000 people, I have received eight coupons. Only eight of my constituents have cut out the coupon and sent it to me saying that they rather like the idea of getting something for nothing. Would that life were that simple. Fortunately, not all of us will be subjected to the sort of pressure that is sought to be exercised.

I notice that in the January 12 edition of *The Star* the paper said:

"If the Bill is sabotaged we will go all out to nail those responsible."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] What sort of Members of Parliament does that newspaper think we have if it thinks that, simply by exercising such blackmail, it can force hon. Members to make a misjudgment?

Sir Paul Bryan: One of my hon. Friends has received four coupons and another has received two, but I have received none.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes the point for me. In spite of the ease with which the Bill is offered, and in spite of the seductiveness of the concept of something for nothing, very few pensioners will fall for it, because they know how life operates. They know that this is an attempt to tell them that there is an easy way out. It is an attempt to tell them that there is some way in which a party which failed to help them previously will give them something for nothing in the future.

People of pensionable age, perhaps more than any other group, know perfectly well that there is no such thing as something for nothing. They know how to manage their resources and how to determine their priorities. Above all, they know that this type of cheap gimmick is not to be respected and will not be responded to.

There are many other reasons why my right hon. and hon. Friends, having considered the Bill with seriousness and having weighed up whether it is worth supporting, have decided — I suspect, in most cases, without too much trouble—that the Bill is less than honest, will not be delivered, and is misdirected. For that reason, I shall oppose it.

2.9 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Whatever else the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) or *The Star* may have done, they have certainly brought a large number of hon. Members to the House to debate what is clearly an important piece of legislation. I ask hon. Members to consider the arguments that we have heard in the debate. We are talking about 7 million pensioner households and about a not insignificant amount of money which would come out of the total licence money of £723 million which goes to the BBC. The concession would mean that £230 million, or at most £345 million, would be lost.

The Minister came to the Dispatch Box to defend a system which he admits is riddled with anomalies. There is not only the anomaly of people in identical financial circumstances living next door to each other and paying different licence fees, but the anomaly that it costs £155,000 to collect the 5p licence fees and the amount collected is only £29,000. What is the issue? It is that for many pensioners and elderly people, just as home helps and social services help them overcome their loneliness, so radio and television are crucial to help overcome that loneliness too. This debate is interesting and important, because it is all about how much people can afford, and we must remember that we are talking about some of the worst paid pensioners in Europe. Perhaps that is why we had such controversy earlier in the week at the end of which the Government gave in on the £5 severe weather payment.

The Bill contains three proposals. The first is for free television licences for pensioners who are living alone or with other pensioners or minors. It is not for all pensioners, and it might have been a little better if the hon. Member for Walsall, North had made that a little clearer in the title of his Bill. This is not a totally open commitment. The second proposal is to scrap the anomalous 5p. That is such an anomaly that even the Government could concede that it should go immediately. The third proposal is that the money which the BBC will lose should come from the taxpayer. I shall deal in turn with those matters.

First, the Government should have accepted, as they were invited to accept, the Peacock recommendation that supplementary income pensioners should be entitled to free television licences. That would cost the Treasury £80 million. That is a small category of needy people, and relatively little cost.

Clearly, it is right that pensioners who are well off should not have free television licences. Such a payout is clearly ludicrous and the examples of previous Prime Ministers or the present Prime Minister demonstrate that. Free TV for supplementary pensioners is what the Peacock committee recommended and the Government could easily adjust the £80 million to pay for that. We are against all pensioners receiving free television licences. We are also against continuing anomalies.

Thirdly, we accept that the television licence has to be paid because the BBC needs money, and we would not vote for clause 3 which says that that money should come directly from the Government. That is because we do not trust the Government with the BBC.

Money lost by concession must be raised in some other way and perhaps younger and richer people should have to pay more for television licences. Issues of that sort could be looked at in Committee. For example, we should look to see whether we could have a phased introduction of the system or whether we could have different rates for black and white and colour television. There are all sorts of possibilities provided we have a system which is simple and administratively easy.

The Minister says that the DHSS would find it impossible to identify how free television licences could be given only to those on supplementary benefit. The DHSS keeps records of people on supplementary benefit, the post offices know the pensioners and the Minister's own poll tax proposals will provide an additional check.

Our first priority is a decent pension. Secondly, we want to abolish standing charges, and only thirdly would we intend to be more generous about television licences for pensioners. As the Government are not willing to put up the pension to a decent rate and are not willing to abolish standing charges, they should at least have the generosity to accept the Bill on Second Reading. They give tax handouts to the rich in their Budgets, while earlier in the week £5 for the poor had to be prised out of them. Some of the Government's Back Benchers will vote against them. I hope that many of them will do so and that Ministers will realise that pensioners will be watching the Government and will condemn them if they show no compassion and do not allow the Bill to go to Committee.

If the Government resist the Bill, they are saying that it is not worthy of consideration. There has been a campaign for this measure for several years. I am sure that pensioners throughout Britain believe that the Bill should be given a Second Reading. The Government should realise that electorally they will be in severe difficulty if they do not agree. I call on Conservative Members to allow

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

the Bill to proceed to Committee so that there can be real progress, not a knee-jerk negative reaction by an uncaring Government.

Mr. Winnick *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 162, Noes 183.

Division No. 55] **[2.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley, N)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, Tony
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joseph Ashton and
Mr. Tony Banks.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick Nicholls and
Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly negatived.

2.28 pm

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was fortunate enough to come first in the ballot for private Members' Bills. It is disgraceful that the payroll vote—I saw for example the chairman of the Tory party, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary voting against the Bill—has been brought in to vote down a measure which represents fairness and justice for pensioners and I seek your advice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has got his point on the record. He and the House are aware that, thank goodness, the Chair has no control over the motives which influence hon. Members to vote one way or the other.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course we recognise that you have no control over the matter that you have just mentioned, but the Prime Minister has control over the fact that members of the Cabinet, Ministers and members of the Tory party's payroll vote have been wheeled out to vote against the Bill, thus disposing finally of the Prime Minister's phoney compassion for the poor and for pensioners. We have just seen the genuine hard face of Thatcherism doing down the pensioners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can only repeat that those are not matters over which the Chair has any control. I think that the whole House knows that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must first deal with the remaining Orders of the Day. If hon. Members still wish to raise points of order after that, I shall take them then.

OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 April.

POLICE COMPLAINTS AUTHORITY (INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 January.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT 1982 (Amdt) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 6 February.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If there are still points of order, I shall take them now.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicester, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I seek your guidance. Those hon. Members who do not hold office and who are not part of any payroll vote have been insulted tremendously just because they were totally opposed to giving the Bill a Second Reading. Is it not an improper use of points of order to denigrate those hon. Members who, like me, are quite properly opposed to such Bills?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Speaker has certain powers in respect of matters that are sent to various Committees of the House. I hope that you will convey my point of order to him.

Some of those who turned up to vote on the Bill used free concessionary cars to do so. Ministers were able to get to the House because they have a concession—a free car. One of them, the Home Secretary, could not even make it, even though he has a free car. It is a scandal that Ministers should turn up in free cars paid for by the taxpayers while at the same time refusing to allow a concession in the form of free television licences for pensioners. I want that issue to go to the appropriate Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Both hon. Members have now made their points, and they are on the record. I can repeat only that they are not points of order but debating points.

Thames Water Authority (Abstraction Policy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): I am grateful for the opportunity in today's Adjournment debate to raise the subject of the excessive abstraction of water from the river Ver in my constituency. It is a particular pleasure to have responding to the debate my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction whose creative mind, to my great admiration, has been fertile in producing ideas in his main sphere of housing. It is a privilege to have him applying his mind to the rather more narrow but still important matter which concerns me today. I imagine that it causes the Minister some wry amusement to find me complaining about the excessive dryness, rather than the wetness, of the valley in my constituency.

But, in this matter ideology plays no part.

The dwindling flow of the river has been of long-standing and intensifying concern to a great many of my constituents, especially those who live in Redbourn and in the city of St. Albans. Evidence of that concern is the large number of people who have written to me on the subject and who have attended public meetings in the constituency on it. I pay tribute to those who have provided me with detailed information from their lifelong experience of the area. I especially pay tribute to the work of the Ver valley society, the members of which have consistently devoted themselves to monitoring the river, improving it and ensuring that it is preserved. They have made its well-being a centre of their activities.

There is plenty of historical evidence that the river used to be substantial. It is only in recent times that it has declined because of excessive abstraction of water from the sources which feed it. As a result, there has been substantial damage to the ecology and loss of leisure and amenity value.

St. Albans owes its existence to the river Ver. The Romans built the town of Verulanium where the river broadened and became possible to ford. Archaeological remains show riverside walks which suggest that the river was then substantial enough to take barges bringing merchandise from Londinium.

The earliest reports of St Alban's martyrdom are from AD 209 and refer to the size and vigour of the river. Indeed, it was so strong that a miracle was required to cross it. The Turin manuscript records that:

"When Alban was led like a lamb to the sacrifice, (he came to a river) whose rapid stream divided the wall from the arena where he was to be executed . . . The crowd was so numberous that they could hardly get across the bridge by evening . . . St Alban betook himself to the stream he had to pass to reach the place of martyrdom, and turned his eyes to heaven. Thereupon the river yielded to his footsteps and provided a dry bed."

As Arthur Swinson in his marvellous piece of detective work, "The Quest for St Alban" wrote:

"The Ver as we know it today could hardly be described as rapid, and this fact has caused some scholars to argue that Alban was not executed at Verulanium but elsewhere."

However, the writer dismisses that because he rightly acknowledges that:

"The river may have flowed more swiftly than today."

as, indeed, it did.

There is ample evidence, too, that for many centuries the river has been an abundant source of fish. Indeed, one of the earliest books on fishing, is called the "Boke of St Albans." It was written in 1486 by the prioress of the Sopwell nunnery, which is close to the river, and suggests that the Ver was then teeming with trout. The city's most famous street, Fishpool street, takes its name from the fish farm which was an important source of food for the abbey and local inhabitants.

The river also used to power several water mills well into this century. One of them still survives intact and in working order at Kingsbury, but, alas, the river's flow is now so meagre that it is hard to imagine that it ever turned the giant wheels of that mill.

Most important of all, the river has always supplied household water to the steadily growing population. As early as 1696 the records of the St Albans water company refer to:

"water running through young trees hollowed out as pipes".

Even in the previous century Francis Bacon boasted in his apothegms that his house at Gorhambury contained piped water which was carried to every room. Because the source was cut off and he faced an infinite charge to re-establish it, the Lord Chancellor built Verulam house nearer the river saying that since he could not carry water to his house, he would carry his house to the water.

Although the Ver seems to have remained a flourishing substantial river until the middle of this century, since then it has dwindled in flow, shrunk in length, narrowed in width and become only intermittent upstream. I understand that 19th century explorers who endeavoured in vain to chart the course of the White Nile eventually concluded that it would be easier to pinpoint its destination than its source. That is even truer of the Ver as it seems to move its source from time to time.

At one time the river is reputed to have begun as far upstream as Whipsnade. By the time the 1976 ordnance survey map was published it had shrivelled up in its higher reaches and started only at the village of Markyate. Now it cannot be traced much north of Redbourn and its flow around and above Redbourn is only intermittent. The nearby springs have already dried up.

In 1976 the whole river dried up almost as far as St. Albans. Since then in the words of the Ver valley society's excellent report, the river has

"deteriorated to the level of a drainage ditch".

That decline has inevitably damaged the fish, flora and fauna which formerly thrived in the valley. For much of its length there is no longer any fishing. When anglers meet in the local pub and swop tall tales about, "The one that got away" and, "You should have seen how big it was", they are referring to the river, not the fish.

My constituent, Mr. Gray of Redbourn, who has been keeping observations for many years, said in a letter to me:

"My observations at Redbourn show no sightings of the following bird species since 1980: Kingfisher, Yellow Wagtail, Heron and Snipe. Since 1980 the streams at Redbourn have frequently dried up, destroying all the fishes and thus breaking the food chain for many species."

Another constituent, school pupil called Robin Chapman who has a keen interest in conservation wrote:

"In the few years I have been living in Redbourn the river Ver has been decreasing rapidly. In 1985 I spent a few whole days clearing out a pond in Redbourn with a conservation group. Now even that has dried up."

A fellow pupil, Josh Harrison, wrote:

"I am very disappointed about the number of animals which have been forced to leave the area due to the river gradually losing water."

I am sure that most people share his sentiment. Mr. Kellard, who has been actively concerned with the Ver since giving evidence at the 1951 inquiry and before, tells me that farmers find

"the river is sometimes too polluted for cattle to drink."

Apparently, the flow from the pure springs is inadequate to dilute the gunge of surface run-off.

What has brought about this decline in a once flourishing river? It is certainly not a change in local climate. Unfortunately, the Ver valley has not been basking in dry Mediterranean heat while neighbouring valleys, which have not seen their rivers diminish in the same way continue to receive England's traditional rains. The reason is simply the sharp increase in the abstraction of water since the last war to supply both a growing population and the industries of Luton. A.P. Herbert neatly reversed the causality when he wrote:

"The population's habit is to grow
In every region where the water's low."

In 1951 Luton corporation applied for a licence to abstract some 3.5 million gallons of water a day from the boreholes of Redbourn. At that time the local water company was already operating boreholes, including ones at Kensworth and Redbourn, which supplied 4.5 million gallons a day for St. Albans' needs. Therefore, the application was opposed by St. Albans city council, Hertfordshire county council and the Thames water board and an inquiry was held.

The inquiry was told that Luton's need was urgent to allow the expansion of factories and the associated population in Luton and Dunstable, particularly for the General Motors works. Nevertheless, the inspector refused the application. His ruling was overruled and a provisional licence was granted by the Minister to abstract an additional 1 million gallons a day.

In 1961, Parliament passed the Luton Water Order, which permitted that abstraction to be increased to 3·5 million gallons per day, and this licence subsequently passed to the management of the present Thames water authority. Other licences granted since 1961 permit a total of up to 11·2 million gallons per day to be abstracted from the Ver valley, and the actual off take is not far short of that at about 10·5 million gallons. This is more than double the off take at the end of the war and near the maximum that would be permitted.

What can be done to restore the flow in the ailing River Ver? There are three options. First, and undoubtedly the best in the long term, is to reduce the amount of water abstracted from bore holes in the Ver valley. In the past, it has been suggested that the needs of Luton industry, which must obtain the necessary water to enable it to thrive, might be supplied from the Ouse valley and Graffham water. This should be considered as an alternative to pumping the Ver valley dry.

Ultimately, there must even be a limit to the amount abstracted for domestic use in St. Albans. The only chance of curbing domestic use is the introduction of metering, once this becomes sufficiently cheap. I note that the Colne valley water authority's corporate plan shows that metered demand in the area has been declining by 1 per cent. per annum, whereas unmetered demand continues to grow by 2 per cent. per annum. In practice, that is not likely to come about soon, and the population and the amount of housing are expanding.

Given that we are near the maximum total offtake from existing licences, we shall soon face the crunch and we cannot permit any increase in the abstraction above the total level permitted so far. Pipelines will have to be established to bring water from further afield if that becomes necessary. That would be the perfect opportunity to take off the current excessive pressure from the Ver. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will press the Thames water authority to plan along those lines in its future planning.

The second option was succinctly put by Richard Morgan, the chairman of the Redbourn parish council, who wrote:

"the key to the whole problem lies in the fact that water abstracted from the Ver Valley is used in the Luton area, and then returned to the Lea Valley instead of the Ver."

Effluent from industry, if sufficiently purified, could be used to replenish the Ver in its upper reaches, but obviously this would be acceptable only if the used water were free of pollutants. There is already concern in the area about pollution because of the presence of a toxic waste plant at Redbournbury, for which there are proposals for expansion. That is another matter.

The third option is the only one feasible in the short term. That is to pump compensatory water from elsewhere to the Ver when its level falls too low. The Luton Water Order 1961, which allows the abstraction of up to 3·5 million gallons per day upstream specifies such action. It says that if the average flow in the Ver at St. Michael's bridge is below 1 million gallons a day in a 72 hour period, the company may be required to provide up to 700,000 gallons a day of compensatory water to restore the flow to the 1 million gallons a day level.

Such an order for restoration has been invoked only once, on 19 October 1978. The Colne valley water authority then met the requirement not by pumping in extra water from elsewhere, although a pipeline exists with an outlet at Shafford farm, but by stopping pumping at the Bow bridge pumping station until the river returned to the specified level. It is generally agreed that the flow in the late summer may be only a quarter of the 1 million gallons per day specified in the Luton Water Order 1961. However, action to require compensatory flows is not automatic. It has to be invoked and only St. Albans council can invoke it. It must first measure the flow accurately, but unfortunately the measuring equipment that was used in 1978 is no longer extant, and the telemetric apparatus that the council has been considering was costed at a prohibitive price of £25,000. It is inconceivable that cheaper equipment is not available to accomplish this comparatively simple task.

There have been unconfirmed reports that portable equipment used in the Chiltern river Misbourne costs only about £400,000. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to make available his Department's expertise to advise my local council on how to carry out cost-effectively its monitoring role. It would be absurd if, through lack of a measuring system, we lost our river, especially as we have spent £29,000 in recent years upon opening up the Ver valley walkway to enable people to enjoy the benefits of the river. It would be said if people who were out for a pleasant stroll along the bank of the river were to find that the river had vanished.

If compensatory action were invoked to maintain the flow at St. Michael's bridge at 1 million gallons a day, that would be only a partial solution. Under the current terms

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

of the 1961 order, any compensatory water is liable to be delivered, or pumping reduced, well downstream of Redbourn, so the most vulnerable part of the river would not be restored.

Under the Water Resources Act 1963, the Thames water authority has the power to establish minimum flow levels along the river. That is what is needed along the river Ver. I ask my hon. Friend to consider the implications of the Act and to impress upon the water companies the need to consider the environmental implications of their abstraction policy. The Act refers to the water authorities having regard to

"in particular any natural beauty which the inland water and its surroundings may possess."

The characteristics of the upper reaches of the Ver have certainly been altered by the drying up of the river. The Act requires that that should be taken into account.

I very much hope that the Thames water authority will decide to set a minimum flow for the Ver, following the study that it announced just before Christmas of the Ver and a number of other similarly vulnerable rivers. I welcome the decision to undertake this study. I believe that that decision was made following the representations that I and the Ver valley society made to it. In the first phase of the study the consultants will seek to establish what the Ver was like in the good old days before the depletion of recent decades. To that end they wish to obtain oral, photographic and written evidence from as many individual sources as possible.

One of the main reasons for raising this issue today is the hope that the ensuing publicity will encourage those with first-hand or inherited experience of the Ver and its surrounding valley in the early years of the century to contact the consultants. Izaak Walton, who knew the Ver well, quoted the old saying, that

"rivers and the inhabitants of the watery element were made for wise men to contemplate, and fools to pass by without consideration."

Those who have studied the river Ver are certainly among the wise men. I hope that their efforts to preserve and restore it will be rewarded. I am confident that my hon. Friend the Minister will give sympathetic consideration to this problem.

2.52 pm

The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction (Mr. John Patten): My hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) began by making some very kind remarks about me, which I greatly appreciated. However, there was a sting in the tail—a challenge to bend what intellectual equipment I am left with to this problem and look at it hard. My Department has been doing that, and it will continue to do so. My hon. Friend set many hares running in my mind and used an extremely telling phrase that will remain with me—pumping the Ver valley dry. He and his constituents do not want that to happen; nor does the Thames water authority or I want that to happen. That very important motif ran throughout my hon. Friend's admirable speech. It will repay close reading.

The historical arguments were telling, but as one went further and further up the headwaters of time they became more and more ingenious. We are used to being reminded about something that happened in the 19th century, but the reference to Dame Juliana in the 15th century was extremely interesting; and this is the first time that I have answered a debate when the historical evidence surrounding the martyrdom of a saint has been prayed in aid of a particular policy change that was asked for by a right hon. or hon. Member. My hon. Friend has had considerable correspondence with my Department and the Thames water authority in fighting this particular campaign with the co-operation of local residents and parish councils such as the Redbourn parish council. Everything that he has said has made us think more and more about this problem. I am grateful to him for the way he has aired the interests of the people in the valley and those who love the valley, and its environment.

In replying to the debate I shall not be able to comment in detail on particular solutions, partly because the debate is premature—we do not have the results of the study commission, to which my hon. Friend has referred—and partly because I have to avoid prejudicing the position of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment should he, or any of us, subsequently be required to decide any appeal in connection with abstractions from the river. We do not have a case in front of us at the moment.

My Department fully appreciates the concern of residents, conservationists and environmentalists in the area. That concern was expressed in a letter from one of my hon. Friend's constituents about the lack of sightings of birds in recent years—the kingfisher, the snipe and others. That is exactly the kind of valuable evidence—although it is not for me to say—that should go to the engineers who are considering the background to this problem. We take that concern to heart. I was particularly struck by the anxiety of the person still at school who had been doing valuable conservation work, and the parish councils that have been involved, notably Redbourn.

Had we more time, I would wish to set my hon. Friend's remarks in the context of the Water Resources Act 1963, and give legislative chapter and verse to the background. My hon. Friend probably knows more about that Act than I do. I shall write to him in the next week or so in order to set the legislative context of what I am going to say.

Let me make a few general remarks on the abstractions affecting the Ver. The feature that is of greatest relevance is the existence of the licences of right to which existing abstractors were entitled when the 1963 Act came into effect. My hon. Friend has already alluded to that fact. Those licences could relate to abstractions from ground water or surface water, and were normally granted in perpetuity.

I understand from the Thames water authority that there are seven major ground water abstractions in the Ver catchment, all for public water supply, operated by water companies. They began before 1963 and have since been covered by licences of right. The total quantity licensed for these sources is 47·8 thousand cu m per day. I understand that abstraction within these limits has tended to increase over the past 15 years and is very close to them now.

The total licensed quantity for all purposes is 53·4 thousand cu m per day, all ground water. Recharge to ground water resources from rainfall is estimated at 66 thousand cu m per day. Those are the figures and the best state of knowledge that we have before we receive the consultants' report. The quantity of recharge will always be a debatable figure, because it is hard to work out from rainfall and the geology exactly what is going into the aquifers. No significant increases to licensed quantities

have been allowed since licensing took effect in 1965, and no increases have been allowed to public supply abstractions. That is the present situation.

I am no engineer, but it is obvious to me that the abstraction of water from a river will reduce flow unless all the water is returned upstream at the abstraction point. Where rivers and ground water are directly connected, as is often the case, the abstraction of ground water has the same effect, although it may take time to build up. Many rivers are affected to some degree by ground water abstraction, but how much depletion is acceptable has to be considered in striking a balance between the needs of water supply and the aquatic and associated environment. That is a major factor in assessing new licences.

I understand from the Thames water authority that in determining new licences it is its policy not to cause new cases of unacceptably depleted rivers and not to exacerbate existing cases. That is its overall policy aim towards which I know that it works.

However — it is quite a big "however" — in determining licences for right of ground water abstractions, depletion of river flow could not be taken into account unless the pre-existing right included a related condition. That was not usually the case when those rights were granted.

However, in response to the concern which my hon. Friend and others of his constituents and those interested in the river and its diminishing river valley have expressed over recent years about the river, and some other chalk streams within the Thames area, the Thames water authority has recently commissioned a comprehensive study of the problem and, of course, the possible solutions. It has sought to find out the facts to see what could be done. The project has already started and the final report is scheduled for early 1988.

The authority is to be commended on commissioning that study. It shows that it is fully alive to the environmental factors, and so it should be—I say that to the authority, as much as to my hon. Friend and his constituents—which my hon. Friend has rightly stressed in his speech. Needless to say, I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's appeal to local residents, and those who know the valley and the history of the water, to make known their views and to give all possible historical and quais-historical evidence that is available to the consulting engineers so that the study can be conducted on as sound a basis as possible.

However, the consulting engineers and others in the Thames water authority may find themselves a little at sea when we get back to Dame Juliana's time. However, doubtless medieval historians from one of our great universities—say, Oxford—will be prepared for a fee to undertake some consultancy work.

We know the objectives of the study. The possible solutions are seen to include such measures as relocating abstractions, providing alternative supplies from outside the affected catchment, redirection of sewage effluence, recirculation of river flows and physical changes to the river channel. Doubtless there are more. Doubtless they are not all self-exclusive. Doubtless a cocktail of all or some of them could in the end be thought suitable. They will not be cheap and the solutions will not be the same for all the rivers and not necessarily for all the rivers up and down the course of each river.

As an integral part of the study, the authority's consultants will be consulting interests outside the authority so that the public's voice will be heard, both through individual suggestions and letters, which, doubtless, my hon. Friend will be passing on to the authority, and, of course, through consultation with the regional recreation and conservation consultative committees.

I am sorry to hear that St. Albans city council has had difficulty in finding a suitable method of measuring the flow in the river. I suggest that it discusses the problem with the water authority. It might also wish to draw on the expertise of the Institute of Hydrology which is part of the Natural Environment Research Council. Those bodies may be able to help the city council with its problems in obtaining equipment which it can afford.

I have no doubt that when it takes its decisions on the report, the authority will take full account of the concerns that my hon. Friend has put so lucidly this afternoon on behalf of his constituents and others concerned with the river and its future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 19 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Gairloch Harbour Order Confirmation Act 1987
2. Shetland Islands Council (Ham Voe, Foula) Order Confirmation Act 1987

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ADVOCATES' WIDOWS' AND ORPHANS' FUND ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Rifkind presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 8 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to the Advocates' Widows' and Orphans' Fund: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Tuesday 27 January and to be printed. [Bill 45]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Opencast Mining

1. **Mr. Coleman** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Coal about opencast mining in south Wales.

24. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Coal about opencast mining in the Ystradgynlais area in Powys; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): I have not recently met the chairman of British Coal to discuss opencast mining.

Mr. Coleman: It was recently reported that the Secretary of State had overruled his inspector concerning a planning application for opencast mining in his own constituency. Will the Secretary of State state precisely his reasons for that? Will he issue a circular containing them, so that local authorities dealing with planning applications for opencast mining may have them for their guidance when deciding upon future applications, whether by British Coal or by private persons?

Mr. Edwards: The reasons were set out in the decision letter. Basically, we had to weigh up the importance of opencast mining to the economy and to the Welsh coal industry—it makes a significant contribution—and the effect of this scheme, especially on the environment, tourism and the local economy. Each case must be decided on its merits.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Secretary of State say whether he is opposed to opencast mining alongside village communities? In my constituency at Upper and Lower Cwmtwrch there are proposals for opencast mining at the Brynhenllys site. Will he reject those proposals?

Mr. Edwards: British Coal has appealed against the refusal of Powys county council to grant planning permission at the site named by the hon. Gentleman. I cannot comment on the merits of the proposal because it is clearly one that I shall have to consider as Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot discuss the merits of an individual application.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Secretary of State aware of the strength of feeling about schemes that could continue for years, disfigure the environment and cause considerable nuisance and difficulty for many residents in the borough of Merthyr Tydfil? Will he at least consider that these decisions and proposals can have a long-term effect in terms of attracting industry to and commercial development in the borough? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman takes those aspects into account.

Mr. Edwards: All those matters and their effect on local communities must be considered, but we must also recognise that there is a need for the range of special and high-quality coals which the industry produces. They provide employment opportunities and contribute to the financial profitability of British Coal. All those matters must be considered on an individual-case basis.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Secretary of State not heed the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) and apply to applications in the valley communities the same criteria as he is applying to the application in his constituency? Does he not think that it is a shame that he made that decision?

Mr. Edwards: It is not a shame that I made that decision. I happen to think that it was right. This is the only one of the cases currently under consideration that has come before me at present. I shall give exactly the same detailed consideration to all these cases.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Secretary of State realise that Labour Members appreciate that there are economic arguments for and against opencast mining and, likewise, important environmental considerations? We are trying to elicit Welsh Office policy. Is it that opencast mining is permissible in any part of Wales other than Pembroke?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman started by very fairly weighing up the balance of the issues that must be considered in each case. Only one of the decisions has come before me in the recent past. A number of other cases are being considered by the Department or are likely to come before it in the near future, and we shall consider each on its merits.

"A Good Old Age"

2. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what progress his Department has made in co-ordinating services for the elderly following his consultation document "A Good Old Age" published in September 1985; and if he will make a statement.

19. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present arrangements for looking after the elderly in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): My right hon. Friend announced last Thursday that he has issued a circular inviting local authorities, health authorities and others to submit bids for a grant programme over an eight-year period which will encourage new developments in the care of elderly people in Wales on the lines described in "A Good Old Age".

Mr. Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman spell out the effective level of co-operation between local and health authorities in Wales during the present cold spell? How many avoidable deaths occurred during this period because of a lack of effective community care?

Mr. Robinson: We have been monitoring the position closely during the cold weather and have no reason to believe that the emergency arrangements of health and local authorities are not working well. We have made additional funds available for voluntary organisations to deal with the short-term crisis for homeless people, and made £25,000 available to Shelter Wales.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Does the hon. Gentleman have other proposals to help the elderly if the weather becomes colder? Does he have any plans to increase the £5 weekly grant to £7 or £10 to help the elderly in the present situation?

Mr. Robinson: That is a matter not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has already been a significant contribution to "A Good Old Age" by the Government's quadrupling of spending on heating, including the severe weather payments scheme? Is this record not far superior to that of the Lib-Lab Government?

Mr. Robinson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In response to "A Good Old Age" we intend to make £1 million available in the current financial year, £2 million in 1988-89 and £4 million in 1989-90, and to extend the scheme for a further eight years. My hon. Friend may recall that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State initially announced in the Welsh Grand Committee a funding programme for three years of £5 million. Our programme over the first three years now amounts to £7 million.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the Minister accept that a prerequisite of a reasonable level of service for the elderly is adequate heating? Does he also accept that last week clearly demonstrated that the Government's legislative provision was inadequate? If it had been adequate, there would have been no need for the Government to override their own procedures. What criteria will have to be fulfilled in terms of temperature and weather conditions generally to enable the existing legislative criteria to be set aside?

Mr. Robinson: I am again asked questions that are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. A supplementary pensioner over 65 is receiving £8 a week for heating costs, amounting to £400 a year. For a pensioner over 85 the amount rises to £11 a week, or nearly £600 a year per householder. In addition, there is a £5 heating supplement. Taken together, this package is far more comprehensive than anything Labour had when in office.

Sir Raymond Gower: Will my hon. Friend take a special look at the circumstances of those, particularly retirement pensioners, who, in addition to their retirement pension, enjoy some small industrial pension or tiny secondary income which deprives them not only of supplementary benefit but of everything that goes with it—for example, rebates and heating allowances?

Mr. Robinson: I take note of what my hon. Friend has said. However, that again is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. I am sure that he, too, will take note of my hon. Friend's point.

Dr. Roger Thomas: During his busy week, will the Minister find time to read an Adjournment debate speech in which the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) catalogued the defects that are already showing up in legislation that was passed two years ago with regard to the registration of homes for the elderly? Does the Minister agree with his hon. Friend's conclusion that that legislation is now producing cruelty for the elderly and is fleecing them of their money?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman raises matters that are not my responsibility. However, in the matter of residential homes for the elderly, there is a system of regulation which is controlled by the social services departments which register and inspect all private and voluntary homes under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Best: The House will welcome my hon. Friend's statement that funding will be made available over the eight-year period. Has he any schemes to assist organisations to help elderly people to keep their houses in good repair?

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about that important initiative. On the matter of schemes to help improve the houses of the elderly that are in disrepair, we are putting up to £200,000 into home improvement agency services through organisations such as Care and Repair Ltd. in each of the next three years to help elderly people improve their homes so that they may live in comfort.

Mr. Barry Jones: Low income is the chief factor in the pensioners' fight against the cold, and the 40p award aroused contempt throughout Wales. Does the Minister understand that one way of improving services for the elderly is to ensure that there is less violence and intimidation on our housing estates? Why does the Minister not begin a much wider campaign for better safety locks and improved estate lighting? Does he agree that having more policemen on the beat would eliminate muggings of elderly people?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman is treading on rather soft ground, because it was a Labour Government who failed to pay the Christmas bonus to pensioners in two of the last five years that they were in office. As the

hon. Gentleman is aware, we have already launched our priority estates programme in Wales. It is having considerable success and has recently been expanded.

Secondary Schools (Expenditure)

3. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1978-79, at constant figures.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): In 1985-86 the amount spent per pupil in secondary schools in Wales was £1,158. The equivalent figure for 1978-79 was £1,002.

Mr. Knox: Does not my hon. Friend's answer make nonsense of Opposition claims of cuts in education expenditure?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In real terms expenditure on education remains broadly constant, while pupil numbers have decreased. Local authority revenue spending on education in Wales, excluding school meals and milk, was slightly higher in 1985-86 than in 1979-80, despite a significant decline in pupil numbers.

Dr. Marek: Is the Minister aware that expenditure on education increased in 1979-80 as a result of decisions taken by the last Labour Administration, and that in the years between 1980-81 and 1984-85 it went down from £694·3 million to £689·3 million at 1984-85 prices? Those figures relate to local authority net expenditure. If the figure has now increased again, does the Minister agree that that is the result of a last-ditch cynical manoeuvre to try to rescue his extremist and do-not-care party from being annihilated in Wales in the next general election?

Mr. Roberts: I do not have the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted. However, I do have figures for spending on primary and secondary pupils in cash and in cost terms from 1976-77 to 1985-86. To put it briefly, those figures are on the up all the way.

Mr. Raffan: Will my hon. Friend agree to press upon Clwyd county council in particular that it would have far more to spend per secondary school pupil if only it could muster the political will to tackle the county's massive number of surplus places? If those surplus places remain untackled, they will amount to 23,000 by 1989.

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a problem with surplus places in Wales, including Clwyd. We must take hard decisions to eliminate them.

Mr. Barry Jones: The Minister is complacent and self-congratulatory. May I remind him of the chilling and rather disturbing reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Wales over the past five years? The reports show shabby, dilapidated and damp schools. The schools depend upon parent-teacher associations to raise vital money, the equipment is defective and the texbooks dog-eared. Surely the Minister has reason to believe that the inspectorate is pointing to the real situation in Wales. Why has he boosted funds to public schools by over 1,000 per cent., when our state sector goes short?

Mr. Roberts: We are making substantial capital resources available to local authorities in Wales. Since the introduction of the new capital control system in 1981-82, capital allocations have increased substantially. By next year that increase will be 56 per cent. We can make the capital available to local authorities, but we cannot force them to spend it on schools.

Mid Glamorgan Area Health Authority

4. **Mr. John** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what additional revenue income he proposes to allocate to Mid Glamorgan area health authority in the forthcoming year.

Mr. Mark Robinson: In 1987-88 Mid Glamorgan district health authority will have a revenue allocation of nearly £125 million, an increase of just under 6 per cent. over the previous year. In addition, it will be able to retain all the revenue income that the authority itself generates.

Mr. John: The Minister will know that at Rhiwfelin hospital yesterday there was a celebration for the 100th birthday of one of the patients. Will he accept that no one who attended that celebration could fail to be impressed by the dedication of the staff to the patients and the homely atmosphere that has been created? Does the Minister agree that some of the elderly cannot be accommodated within the ideas of catering for old age within the community and that there needs to be a continuation of hospital places to accommodate such people? Does he think that the Welsh Office should have another look at the revenue implications in order to keep hospitals such as Rhiwfelin open so that people may be accommodated with dignity in their great old age?

Mr. Robinson: I should like to associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the dedicated work of the staff at Rhiwfelin hospital. I understand that the authority is currently engaged in a consultation exercise as to the future of the hospital. Should local agreement not be reached on the matter, it will be referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for decision. Some of the points made by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) are precisely the issues my right hon. Friend will take into account when reaching his decision.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the Minister satisfied that sufficient resources are being devoted to the care of the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped, given the highly critical report by the Hospital Advisory Service, which said last week that mental illness care in one particular Welsh county was in danger of collapse? Given the history of scandals in Wales concerning care of the mentally ill and mentally handicapped, will the Minister give us assurances that sufficient resources are being given to the area health authorities for such care?

Mr. Robinson: The report to which the hon. Lady refers goes into issues that are way beyond the details of Welsh Office funding. It concerns the role of the local health authority and social services department. However, the cash limit for 1987-88 for the All-Wales Mental Handicap Initiative, subject to parliamentary approval, is likely to be in the region of £10 million to develop new services under the mental handicap strategy.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Is it not apparent to the Minister that, with the marked decline in Health Service facilities and with mass unemployment, a poor environment and all the social factors stemming from those issues, Mid Glamorgan requires not another hospital closure but more adequate funding of its Health Service facilities?

Mr. Robinson: I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can describe a 33 per cent. growth in recurrent revenue resources to district health authorities between 1978-79 and the present time as a cut in available resources. I also cannot understand how he can describe as a decline a hospital building programme that amounts to almost £490 million at today's prices since 1979. To my way of thinking that is a considerable increase in the hospital and care services available in the Principality.

Working Population (Intermediate Areas)

5. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the percentage of the working population of Wales residing in intermediate areas; and what was the corresponding figure for 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Fifty-one per cent. of the economically active population of Wales live in intermediate areas. The corresponding figure for early 1979 was approximately 13 per cent.

Mr. Wardell: While I accept from the Secretary of State's figures that there has been an expansion in the population of Wales living in intermediate areas, does he agree that at the same time he has drastically reduced from 90 to 38 per cent. the proportion of the working population who live in assisted areas receiving regional development grants? Is he really proud of the fact that from April this year a moratorium of two months will be imposed on the payment of regional development grants? The Government are once again increasing the divide between north and south, with Wales firmly in the north.

Mr. Edwards: On the moratorium, we have been faced with a considerable bulge in the number of applications. There was an overlap on the two schemes and there has been a four-month moratorium under the old scheme and there will be a two-month moratorium under the new scheme. In each of the years 1984, 1985, and 1986 the estimated number of new jobs created following acceptance of regional selective assistance and regional development grants in Wales was well over 12,000. In 1986 the figure was more than 16,000. That compares with the 1979 figure of under 10,000. It is clear that the Government's regional policy is creating more new jobs than were created by that followed by the previous Labour Government.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the insistence of the Treasury on thinking of things solely in 12-month periods is positively unhelpful to his tremendous efforts to create a consistent, long-term development policy for the Principality?

Mr. Edwards: We have had a very considerable bulge in applications. We have been dealing with record figures for jobs created by our regional policy. During 1986 no fewer than 135 offers of assistance totalling more than £37·5 million were expected, promising to create more than 5,400 new jobs and to safeguard 4,000 existing jobs in Wales. These figures show that within the flexibility that we have—and we have a three-year PESC period—we are able to pursue a very effective regional policy, not least in the area of Wales represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer).

Mr. Wigley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the whole of my constituency is an intermediate area and that the Pwllheli employment exchange shows for this month an unemployment rate of 22·2 per cent. compared with an average of 19·1 per cent. for the full development areas throughout Great Britain? Is it not high time that the Secretary of State either looked again at the designation of intermediate areas or came forward with a much more effective regional policy?

Mr. Edwards: Any regional policy must have a degree of consistency. We have had a major review and we should not change the boundaries of areas every few months or every year or so. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the scope for giving selective assistance in the intermediate areas is considerable. When significant projects have been brought forward, it has nearly always been possible to put together a financial package to enable us to secure them. As the hon. Gentleman knows, his constituency is faced with problems of location and infrastructure. Possibly the greatest single contribution that we are making in the hon. Gentleman's part of Wales is the rapid progress towards completing the A55 dualling.

Sir Raymond Gower: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the package which the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and Winvest are able to offer industrialists who are considering moving into Wales has proved adequate since the boundaries for grants were last altered?

Mr. Edwards: The fact that we have attracted about 20 per cent. of all inward investment into the United Kingdom, when we have about 7 per cent. of the population, shows that Wales is getting a very fair share. One threat that is hanging over that inward investment is the Labour party's promise to reintroduce exchange controls. I cannot think of a more devastating blow to job and investment prospects for Wales, as it would immediately halt inward investment and have a devastating impact on decisions made by overseas companies which have major plants here and are planning expansion.

Mr. Anderson: When the Secretary of State talks about fair shares for Wales and the effectiveness of regional policy, would he care to read today's *Financial Times* supplement on regional policy, which speaks of the collapse of such a policy under this Government and says, among other things, that the increase in unemployment in Wales while the right hon. Gentleman has been in office is double that in Northern Ireland? Is that the legacy that the right hon. Gentleman will proudly leave Wales?

Mr. Edwards: Unemployment in Wales has fallen in eight of the past nine months. The number of people unemployed in December was about 10,500 down on the peak of March last year and we have an all-time record allocation of Government factories at only just under 2·5 million sq ft. That shows the complete nonsense of describing our policies as a failure.

Labour Statistics

6. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what were the unemployment totals and percentages for *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Clwyd at the latest date for which such figures are available and for May 1979; and if he will give the percentage increase.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 11 December 1986 the total numbers of unemployed claimants in Wales and Clwyd

were 173,546 and 23,729 respectively. The number of unemployed claimants in Wales, seasonally adjusted, was 165,900, or 13·4 per cent. of the working population. In May 1979 it was 73,100, an increase over the period of 127 per cent.

Mr. Jones: Those are deeply disturbing figures, especially when seen against the background of the recently revealed loss of some 113,000 manufacturing jobs since 1979. One calculation is that, at the current rate of decrease, it will take until 1994 simply to reduce the figure to 100,000. Has the right hon. Gentleman realised the serious consequences that there would be for north-east Wales if the predatory and greedy BTR takeover bid for Pilkington was successful? I remind the right hon. Gentleman that my constituents at Queensferry have signed a petition against the takeover. Will he urge his Cabinet colleagues to reconsider the weak decision taken by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry not to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the public interest demands an about-turn, especially as junior Ministers do not support their Secretary of State? To us in Wales it appears that the City is increasingly corrupt. We want action on Pilkington.

Mr. Edwards: On the ground of competition policy, bearing in mind the consistent application of that policy, and with the recommendation of the Director General of Fair Trading in front of him, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made the absolutely correct decision. I am equally sure that investors in the company will want to take very careful account of Pilkington's impressive record in research and development and on maintaining regional operations in terms of headquarters and research and development. I am sure that they will also want to consider the company's successful record. I hope that investors will bear all those factors carefully in mind when they decide the long-term future of the company.

Mr. Terlezki: I think that we ought to welcome the reduction in unemployment in Wales, although it is marginal. My right hon. Friend travels far and wide to introduce industries to Wales and we have an excellent labour force, but if the Opposition continue with their scaremongering, industries from all over the world which intend to come to Wales, and which we need, will not come.

Mr. Speaker: What is the question?

Mr. Edwards: There is no doubt that hon. Members on both sides of the House should welcome the steady fall in unemployment that has taken place over the past nine months in Wales, and which as continued to be evident in the figures for the most recent available month. I repeat that the policies that are being advanced by the Opposition represent a serious threat. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has introduced his own policy or, apparently, a whole range of competing development agencies in almost every hamlet of the Principality. That policy was promptly ridiculed and dismissed by almost all his colleagues, including a former Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Foot: As the right hon. Gentleman is so proud of his regional policy, will he tell us precisely how much the Treasury has saved on that policy since 1979? All those millions could have been better spent in the worst-hit areas of Wales.

Mr. Edwards: As I have already pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman, the policies that we are pursuing have produced a rising number of new jobs, created as a result of that assistance. There has been a record amount of factory allocations and, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware, we have allocated substantial new resources to the valleys initiative and the proposed garden festival that will be held in his constituency.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be a general welcome for the clear lead that he gave just now in his answer about the Government's belief that the independence of Pilkington is vital, not only for the retention of existing jobs, but for the provision of future jobs in north Wales?

Mr. Edwards: There are two quite separate matters involved. There is the question of competition policy, and whether to send the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, when making his announcement, pointed out that would not necessarily have led to any different decision.

The other question concerned the merits of the bid that now has to be considered by the investors. I believe that Pilkington has an outstanding record based on research and development and that the long-term record and the company's prospects should be high in the minds of those who have to take the decision.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware that the unemployment percentage in the Cardigan area is one of the highest in Wales and stands at 26 per cent., as it has done for the past 10 years. I wonder what plans the Secretary of State has in mind to try to resolve this problem.

Mr. Edwards: I very much welcome the active initiatives that are being taken particularly in the Teifi valley by the enterprise agencies. I believe that the activities of those organisations will make an increasingly valuable contribution in some of the more difficult rural areas where it is not easy, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, to create new jobs. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman pointed out that this sutuation of high unemployment has continued in the area for a long time, including during the period of the Lib/Lab alliance.

Housing Associations

7. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what level of support he is giving to housing association activities in Wales.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. Friend has increased support for the housing association movement in Wales by 22 per cent. in 1987-88 to £54·7 million. With receipts, this will allow a gross Housing Corporation programme of nearly £59 million and is ample evidence of our continuing commitment to the housing association movement in Wales.

Mr. Jones: May I remind my hon. Friend of the recent announced partnership between a housing association, Cardiff city council and free enterprise sector capital to build over 600 new homes in St. Mellons? Many of those

homes will be let to people on the council housing waiting list. Does he agree that this scheme offers a much more imaginative way forward, which I hope will be followed by other schemes in Wales?

Mr. Robinson: I entirely agree with the sentiments that my hon. Friend has expressed. Of the amounts that I have mentioned this afternoon, the Housing Corporation has set aside £10 million for such schemes in Wales. I am pleased to announce that projects similar to the St. Mellons scheme, but on a smaller scale, have been approved at Abergavenny, Chepstow and Camarthen. A number of others are under further consideration.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Although I welcome the increased funding for housing associations, can the Minister tell us how his figure of allocation agrees with the bids put in by housing associations in Wales or by how much it falls short? What is the declared capacity of the associations to build units as compared with the allocations made?

Mr. Robinson: That is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Housing Corporation. The reaction that I have had from housing associations in Wales shows that they are extremely pleased with the increase in resources that they have been given. Over the last two years those resources have been given a boost of 40 per cent.

Mr. Anderson: Will the Minister ensure that all local authorities in Wales are encouraged to follow the model of the St. Mellons scheme, which is welcome? Will he say, as a matter of policy, whether he wants housing associations to build, not for specialist groups and not just for sale, but for the general list for rent?

Mr. Robinson: These schemes require the co-operation of local authorities. In the case of the St. Mellons scheme Cardiff city council is making land available and I hope that other authorities will be similarly involved. I hope that housing associations in Wales will undertake mixed and balanced programmes along the lines that the hon. Gentleman has described.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

County Palatine

25. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he is yet in a position to announce the date of his visit to the county palatine early in the new year, referred to in his answer of 17 November, *Official Report*, column 302; and if he will make a statement.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Norman Tebbit): I hope to visit the county palatine next on 10 March in place of 31 March date to which I referred when I last answered questions.

Mr. Wigley: When the right hon. Gentleman goes to the county palatine, will he tell the residents whether he regards it as a success of his Government's policy that 94 per cent. of the job losses since this Government came into office have taken place in the north and west of these islands, including the north of England, Wales and Scotland, and whether his answer to the unemployment problem is still that people should get on their bikes?

Mr. Tebbit: Given the time that the hon. Gentleman had to rehearse his supplementary question, he has not done terribly well on it. Unemployment is now falling in the United Kingdom. Jobs are being created at a very high rate in the north and west, just as they are in the south. However, it is not surprising that during a period of worldwide decline in such heavy industries as shipbuilding and steel the major job losses in Britain should have been concentrated where those industries are situated. The Government's regional and other policies are doing everything possible to regenerate jobs in those areas. The actions of some Labour local authorities are not conducive to helping in that process.

Mr. Sumberg: Does my right hon. Friend recall that on his last visit to the county palatine, and in particular to Bury, he performed the topping-out ceremony of a new unit at Fairfield hospital? That unit had waited for years to be constructed under a Labour Government. Does he agree that it has taken a Tory Government to build the hospitals, whereas the Opposition merely talk about them?

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is right. Many of the hospitals currently being built by this Government, and the many which have already been completed, were taken out of the Labour Government's programme during the IMF crisis 10 years ago. We should not be surprised at that, because I am reminded that it is just 19 years ago today that the Labour Government announced slashing expenditure reductions which involved postponing the raising of the school-leaving age, led to the introduction of prescription charges, the slashing of the housing programme by 165,000 houses a year and the slashing of defence expenditure. Of course, that is quite normal for Labour Governments, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time was the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins), who has now been given the job as economic spokesman for the SDP.

Mr. Winnick: When the right hon. Gentleman visits the county palatine, will he explain to the people there why he was quite willing to come here in his chauffeur-driven car on Friday to vote down a private Member's Bill that would have assisted some pensioners? Since there has been a great deal written about what he did or did not say about Tories with a conscience, does his conduct on Friday demonstrate that he has much of a conscience?

Mr. Tebbit: Well——

Mr. Winnick: Well . . .

Mr. Tebbit: I felt that I should vote against a measure that would cause an extra burden of taxation to fall upon young widows in order to give free television licences to my noble Friends the Lord Hailsham and the Lord Whitelaw.

26. **Mr. Silvester** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he is yet in a position to give the date of his proposed visit to the county palatine early in the new year, mentioned in his answer of 17 November, *Official Report*, column 302; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tebbit: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Silvester: By the time my right hon. Friend gets to the Duchy, will he make an estimate of the number of people whose jobs will be affected if we were to follow non-nuclear defence and energy policies?

Mr. Tebbit: It would be difficult to make a full estimate of the number of people. British Nuclear Fuels Limited at

Sellafield, Springfields and Risley employs 16,000 people, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, principally at Risley, employs 3,900, the National Nuclear Corporation at Booths Hall and Risley employs 2,300 people, and the CEGB at Heysham 1 and 2 nuclear stations employs 1,250 people. There are, therefore, some 23,000 employees directly in the north-west. BNFL alone estimates that its programme supports a further 50,000 jobs, mostly in the north-west. On top of that, we could add all the Vickers jobs on the new Trident nuclear submarine programme. All in all, an impressive number of jobs would be thrown away by a Labour Government if we ever had that misfortune visited upon us.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

30. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the right hon. Member for Taunton, answering on behalf of the Public Accounts Commission, what criteria the Commission uses in appointing the Accounting Officer for the National Audit Office.

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission (Sir Edward du Cann): In appointing the serving Comptroller and Auditor General to be Accounting Officer for the National Audit Office Vote with effect from 1 January 1984 the commission followed the long-standing practice of appointing the officer in the best position to discharge overall responsibility for policy and for the resources allocated to the office. The C and AG, is of course, by statute, head of the National Audit Office.

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will concur with me when I say —I am glad to have the opportunity to make the point —that I believe that the House of Commons and the nation are well served by the Comptroller and Auditor General and his colleagues in accordance with the long-standing tradition of competence of that office.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question of which I gave him notice last month? Can he say whether, in appointing the Accounting Officer, his ability to take a grip on the financial control of the security services is taken into account? Is not this matter given added importance by the controversy over electronic surveillance data that has blown up in the past three days? It is one of a number of controversies that make it important that the Public Accounts Committee, on behalf of the House, should have oversight of the security forces and what they do.

Sir Edward du Cann: The duties of the Comptroller and Auditor General in regard to the security services are covered by long-standing arrangements that were endorsed by the Public Accounts Committee. Expenditure on the secret service is accounted for by the Cabinet Office. The Comptroller and Auditor General does not examine the records relating to this expenditure, but, instead, receives personal certificates from the responsible Ministers of the Crown to the effect that the payments were properly made from the secret Vote in the public interest. He then certifies the Appropriation Account to this effect. If there is other expenditure on intelligence and security services that might be borne in other Votes, they will then be subject to full audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

I made inquiries about the hon. Gentleman's second point about the communications project, because I thought it would be of interest to the House. I am told that the matter is still at a preliminary stage and that nothing like the sums that were referred to have been incurred. The House will be aware that the National Audit Office has full access to the Ministry of Defence records. The House will also be aware that arrangements exist under which the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee is kept informed of such cases in which there are large expenditures.

Mr. Skinner: As the Accounting Officer may well come from the area known as the City, will the right hon. Gentleman take into account the fact that the field is scattered with individuals who would be suspect as accounting officers? Will the right hon. Gentleman steer clear of Guinness, Morgan Grenfell and all the other merchant banks that have been involved in swindling the public during the past few weeks?

Sir Edward du Cann: I am sure that it would be the wish of the House that I should make it absolutely clear that not only those of us who are concerned with the affairs of the Commission but the House in general have total confidence in the integrity of the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff.

Mr. Williams: Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify one point? He said a few moments ago that nothing like the sums referred to in the press had been incurred. By that does he mean that they have not been incurred so far, or is he saying that they will not be incurred as the total cost of the project?

Sir Edward du Cann: I am told that the project is at an experimental stage. That is why no large expenditures, or no expenditures on the scale of those mentioned in the newspapers, have yet been incurred.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Office Manpower

27. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of lancaster how many Civil Service staff are employed in his Office; and in what capacity.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Norman Tebbit): Four: a private secretary, an assistant private secretary, a personal secretary and an administrative officer.

Mr. Winnick: Bearing in mind that virtually the whole of the right hon. Gentleman's time is spent at Tory Central Office, one wonders why he needs such a staff. Will he explain to the House why quite a number of his Cabinet colleagues have apparently let it be known that he made the alleged remark, namely, that nobody with a conscience votes Conservative? Why should so many of his Cabinet colleagues wish to do him harm?

Mr. Tebbit: First, although I spend a considerable amount of my time on the affairs of the Conservative party, which is the reason why I am not paid as a Minister out of public funds, I also have a considerable workload of Cabinet work and other work which is the concern of my four members of staff at the Cabinet Office.

Secondly, on the libel, which the hon. Gentleman repeated, I have no means of knowing whether Mr. Young

had an informant or whether he invented the alleged quotation himself. However, what I know is that it is a total fabrication and the only doubt is whether it was made up by Mr. Young or by some anonymous, unknown liar.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephone Calls

31. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Lord Privy Seal how many telephone calls from the Palace of Westminster have been logged in the past six months.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): As I made clear in earlier replies to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 5 December, at column *802*, and on 10 December, at column *203*, and to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 19 December, at column *721*, the call logging equipment is capable of storing only the date and time of each call made within the United Kingdom from extensions of the Palace of Westminster exchange; it does not cover direct lines or international calls. This information is stored for no more than two months. Figures for the number of calls logged in the past six months are, therefore, not available.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Lord Privy Seal saying unequivocally that there is therefore no logging whatsoever of any calls that may have taken place between the office of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the office of Mr. Malcolm Turnbull in Australia?

Mr. Biffen: Certainly, If the hon. Gentleman studies tomorrow my answer, he will see that direct lines or international calls are specifically excluded.

Mr. Hickmet: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the embarrassment of the Leader of the Opposition in conducting conversations with a lawyer representing a defendant in a case where the Crown is the plaintiff and where issues of national security are concerned will not be saved by making spurious allegations about his telephone being bugged? The answer is that for cheap political gain and cheap political purposes the Leader of the Opposition is prepared to stoop to whatever tactics are available.

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that I can helpfully add to the reply that I have just given.

Mr. Williams: The Leader of the House said that direct calls and international calls are not logged. Have I misunderstood the House of Commons system? Is it not a fact that if somebody wants to make an international call he has to go via the House of Commons operator? Therefore the call must be logged.

Mr. Biffen: I do suggest that the hon. Gentleman should study the answers that I have given. I have said specifically that international calls are not logged. The hon. Gentleman could check that with the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee, which was responsible for the equipment being installed.

Sales Kiosk

32. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Lord Privy Seal what were the takings in *(a)* the month and *(b)* the year up to 24 December 1986 at the House of Commons sales kiosk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Irving: I have been asked to reply.

The takings of the Refreshment Department's souvenir kiosk in the four-week period and the 12-month period to 24 December 1986 were £182,122 and £504,404 respectively. These figures include VAT and are a record for the Department.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my hon. Friend and all concerned with the remarkably hard work behind those figures. May I ask, first, to what use is any profit included in those figures put, and, secondly, will there by any price reductions? Is he aware of the recent, welcome innovation of selling House of Commons humbugs? Is he further aware that these are sold in a three quarter pound tin at £2·50, whereas in the shop down the road the same weight can be bought for under 80p? Why are House of Commons humbugs so expensive?

Mr. Irving: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the Department. All the staff who have achieved this marvellous result in difficult working conditions in a kiosk which is 6ft by 23ft deserve our thanks. The staff of the whole Department deserve our thanks.

My hon. Friend asks what we do with the money. I can assure him that it is dealt with in an entirely respectable way, unlike things that sometimes happen outside. The money will be reinvested to improve facilities for members of staff and Members of this House, who will have seen a few improvements since 1979. We have a responsibility to see that the budget balances and that we do not call upon the taxpayer for further resources.

My hon. Friend refers to humbugs. If he talks to me afterwards, I can talk to him in greater detail. However, I must advise him that there are two sorts of humbugs —cheap ones that can be bought outside the House, and exclusive, delicious, succulent ones that can be bought in this House. For the quality that we offer, we consider that the price is most reasonable.

Office Accommodation

33. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will make a statement on the latest progress being made in providing additional office accommodation for hon. Members.

Mr. Biffen: Work has now begun on the redevelopment of the area between Parliament Street and Cannon Row, and this scheme is still on schedule for completion in 1990. In addition, as hon. Members will have noticed, the writing rooms above the Division Lobbies were converted into Members' offices during the last summer recess.

Mr. Dormand: Is the Lord Privy Seal confirming that the first phase is likely to be completed by its target date? Secondly, what progress is being made on the second phase? How many additional offices have been made available to hon. Members within the Palace of Westminster during the past 12 months?

Mr. Biffen: On the third point, I cannot be absolutely certain that I have noticed how many offices have been made available, but that will be covered by the reference to the Members' offices that were converted from the rooms above the Division Lobbies. As to the first question, I can confirm that what is popularly known as phase 1 is on schedule for completion in 1990, but at the moment I have nothing further to report on phase 2 beyond what was last said.

Mr. Stokes: Is there any correlation between the size of a Member's office and his contribution here?

Mr. Biffen: Absolutely none. Were there to be such a correlation it would be an invidious task for those operating through the usual channels to have to allocate the offices.

Mr. Soley: Will the right hon. Gentleman also accept that all Ministers would have to abandon their offices if he were to follow the guidance of the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes)?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the increasing concern among a growing number of hon. Members on both sides of the House about the inadequacy of offices for Members, personal assistants and secretaries, which has been partly brought about by the changing nature of the job? Should not the aim be to enable Members of Parliament to have proper secretarial facilities close to the office in which they work, not about half a mile away, as happens in some cases, so that we can do our job more efficiently?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman would argue himself into some difficulties if he asserted that Members had to have accommodation close by their secretaries. Many Members want the repossession of the Palace of Westminster by Members, which would mean that research assistants and the rest would be housed elsewhere. That kind of dilemma will make this a highly topical and contentious issue long after we are drenched with accommodation.

Northern Ireland Business

34. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he has any proposals to reform the conduct of Northern Ireland business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: At present none, Sir.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: While the Northern Ireland Office is addicted to the separate statute book, does my right hon. Friend think that it is in keeping with our system of parliamentary government that Northern Ireland legislation should be done, and should have been done for so many years, in the form of unamendable Orders in Council, only briefly debated?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes the point fairly and he will recall that last February an invitation was issued by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the leaders of the Unionist parties to discuss whether alterations should take place in our system of handling Northern Ireland legislation, and there the matter rests.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall deal only with points of order arising out of questions. I shall take the point of order of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) first.

Mr. Powell: I know that you will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that this is a point of order directed to you and and I am sure that you will give the matter serious consideration. Today, Welsh Questions started at 2.35 pm and ended at 3.10 pm and seven questions out of 24 were reached. I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to give further consideration, along with the House of Commons (Services) Select Committee, to ensuring that Welsh Questions have the full allocation of time from 2.35 pm until 3.30 pm so that matters affecting all constituents in Wales can be aired once every third week in the Chamber. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, kindly to review the matter so that that can be accomplished.

Mr. Speaker: The timing of Questions is not a matter for me——

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am dealing with a point of order. The timing of Questions is a matter to be taken up through the usual channels. In fact, we dealt with nine questions. Questions 19 and 24 were taken with other questions. I do try during Welsh Questions, as the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) will see if he looks at the Order Paper, to call every Member who has a question on the Order Paper. The hon. Gentleman was not rising at a moment when I could have called him.

Mr. Williams: On a point of order arising out of questions, Mr. Speaker. You will recollect that during questions the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that the statement that no one with a conscience would vote Conservative was—in his term—a libel. Clearly, we do not wish to raise anything in the House that is sub judice, and it has put my colleagues and me in a slightly difficult position. Since it is clearly, in his opinion, a libel, it might be helpful if he said whether a writ has been issued so that we know whether we can discuss the matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for being rather over-keen when you were giving a ruling on the first point of order.

Extremely long answers were given to questions 30 and 32 on the National Audit Office and humbugs. I had questions to the Church Commissioners and to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. Could such lengthy answers be recorded rather than read out in full so that hon. Members would not be precluded from asking questions which they have come to the House specifically to ask?

Mr. Speaker: It is the luck of the draw. The hon. Gentleman will know that the arrangements as set out on the Order Paper is that questions to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster take precedence over those to the hon. Member answering for the Church Commissioners on this one day.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: What about the length of answers?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for the length of answers.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) raised an important matter about whether the libel matter is sub judice.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a matter for me.

Mr. Skinner: It is.

Mr. Speaker: Well please try to make it so!

Mr. Skinner: When a matter is sub judice, it is then for Mr. Speaker to tell hon. Members before questions, "Do not get involved in that particular matter because it is sub

judice." Here we have a statement by a member of the Tory Cabinet, telling us that the allegation is libellous. We want to know from this silent right hon. Gentleman, who is usually so voluable, whether he has issued a writ in respect of this case. Hugo Young writes his column tomorrow, and some of us might even read it, so we want to know. You should know as well, Mr. Speaker, so that you can rule hon. Members out of order, if necessary.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hickmet *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It does not help to have more points of order. We shall all know in due course.

Mr. Hickmet: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has been characteristic of the manner in which the Opposition have conducted their opposition in this Parliament that they have used personal innuendo in the Chamber, which is protected by privilege, to make defamatory statements about Conservative Members. For the shadow Leader of the House to condone such behaviour is unparliamentary. Perhaps——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a clear case of a continuation of Question Time. The House must find other ways to raise this matter.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be within your recollection that, at the end of last year, you wrote a long and serious letter about telephone tapping. You will have heard the exchanges today at Question Time. I do not doubt the good faith of the answer given by the Leader of the House, but there are problems here, because international calls appear to be being logged—I do not know whether that is the right term. They are made a note of and registered. There may have been a misunderstanding. Could either you or the Leader of the House consider the issues involved in this, or could the Leader of the House make it clear what his answer involves in relation to international calls of which a note is made? Part of the difficulty in all this is the terminology involved. For instance, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), who is a telephone engineer, says that telephone tapping is the wrong term and one should talk about electronic interference. The niceties of language do not cover the important substance of the issue. It may be that the Leader of the House would like to clear up the position in relation to international calls when he has the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the House will have listened to that.

Mr. Biffen: I am anxious to help the House. I answered the question that was tabled. I am happy to discuss the matter further with the hon. Gentleman.

Local Government (London)

3.38 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the breakdown of local government in parts of the capital".

You will have read in yesterday's *Sunday Telegraph*, Mr. Speaker, that local government is breaking down in Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. In these areas, which above all have one thing in common — they are all Socialist-controlled — costs of providing services are more than twice as great as in similar areas elsewhere, while services are worse, lamentably worse.

The appalling standards of ILEA, where only half those leaving school have O-level equivalent, combine with the Socialist ethos in these boroughs in such a way that, in the richest city in the kingdom, overflowing with work opportunities, one third of men aged between 20 and 24 contrive to claim to be unemployed. That is rose petal Socialism in action. The wrapping may have changed, but the rotten can of writhing snakes is still inside.

The matter is urgent, because of creative accounting. Vast debts are daily being built up which, if met by the local authorities, will lead to further chaos and anarchy. If met elsewhere, there will be a totally unjustified burden on the general taxpayer in order to right the problem. Already, a massive £700 million is owed through deferred purchase schemes. We read today that Haringey may be considering pawning the mayoral regalia along with the office furniture.

It is one thing for the Leader of the Opposition to indulge his fifth form macho fantasies in Ealing; it is another for the long-suffering citizens of London to be socially mugged by his party—the creative force behind urban deprivation. The Labour party does not care. There is urgent need for action from a Government who do. We should debate that now.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has asked leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the breakdown of local government in parts of the capital".

I have listened with care to the hon. Member. I regret that I do not consider the matter that he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Local Government Finance Bill

3.42 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on the conduct of the main business before the House today. As all hon. Members are aware, conventions are laid down regarding notice and our procedures following the publication and Second Reading of Bills which are to be considered by the House. In that connection last Thursday I received from the Secretary of State for the Environment a letter which asked me to agree, on behalf of the Opposition, to a method of procedure for consideration of the Bill. I received that letter on Thursday at about 1 pm. It made no mention of the fact that later that day the Government intended to table 38 amendments, two major revisions of clauses and a new schedule, which itself extends to more than 2,000 words.

That information was not printed on the Order Paper until the following day and was not available in the House until after 1 pm on Friday afternoon. That means that no one in local government affected by the legislation had any opportunity over the weekend to consider the legal or financial implications of the changes to the Bill. Even worse, the Government have presented us, at a very late stage, with notes on clauses which refer to the Bill as it stands and not to it as it is affected by the Government's amendments.

Such are the depths of confusion and chaos that it is a fair guess that even now scribes are busily working away in the Department of the Environment to amend the amendments. In December, the Secretary of State for the Environment claimed that he was the only person who properly understood what the law was in these matters. Even if that is true, he is signally unable to communicate it to anyone else, even, apparently the officials in his own Department.

The reality is that it would be to the disadvantage of everyone concerned, and certainly to this House and to local government, if we were to consider these matters today — matters, I emphasise, which have major legal and financial significance for the whole of local government and for the totality of rate support grant to be paid for the coming financial year.

I understand that, under the Standing Orders, and specifically Standing Order No. 34, it is possible for you, Mr. Speaker, to accept a motion to adjourn so that we do not consider this business today, thus enabling the Opposition and, for all I know, many Conservative Back Benchers, and certainly those in local government, to consider the major implications of what is proposed before they are considered by the Committee. I seek your guidance and advice in the interests of our protection, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The proper place to debate this issue is after the Orders of the Day have been read and the House has gone into Committee. I understand that the Chairman of Ways and Means has selected amendments up to clause 9 for consideration today. The hon. Member will have seen from the Amendment Paper that a procedural motion on the order in which the Bill should be considered has been tabled. The debate on that motion is the proper time to raise this matter.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

respect, I put it to you that your duty is to protect the Members of the House and people generally in respect of legislation. You have just suggested that we have a remedy that we can use when the House goes into Committee, but, as I understand it, we may put our points not to you but to the Chairman of Ways and Means, or whoever is in the Chair. It seems to me that we are facing a difficult matter in that the Government are legislating to put right that which the courts found the Secretary of State to have done. Therefore, we have every reason to want to be able to consult local authorities about the legal implications of this legislation.

I found it impossible to get hold of the schedules and to consult either the Stockport or the Tameside local authority to ascertain the legislation's implications. I should have thought that, if we are to have good legislation, it was essential that you protect the rights of Members and people outside the House to consult about the legislation, so that we can make speeches that are relevant to it and can try to persuade the Government to amend it according to the advice from outside . I understand that it will be impossible for us to do that.

I should have thought that, at this stage, Mr. Speaker, you could accept an Adjournment motion so that we can develop our arguments and the Government can justify their great haste in pushing through the legislation without allowing any of us the right to consult local authorities in the areas from which we come.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Points of order take up time. I think that I can deal with this matter. As the House will know, I have no authority to determine the business of the House. I do not control the order of business. That is a matter for the Leader of the House and the usual channels. Under Standing Order No. 9 it is not possible for me to accept a dilatory motion from the hon. Member at this stage before the orders of the day have been entered upon.

Mr. Spearing: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. You kindly mentioned in your reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that the Chairman of the Committee could deal with this matter because a procedural motion was likely to be moved before we proceeded with the Bill. Even if that procedural motion were moved, the strict limits of the debate would be of the order of proceedings and not whether it was right to proceed with considering the Bill.

Will you confirm that the point that concerns my hon. Friends could be raised with the Chairman of the Committee at the commencement of the Committee proceedings and that, under Standing Order No. 34, it would be open to the Chairman, if he saw fit—if he did not think that it was an abuse of the rules of the House—to accept a motion to adjourn the Committee and beg to ask leave to sit again if that Question were not put forthwith? I understand that that procedure might be followed. Will you confirm that as it might be helpful in Committee?

Mr. Speaker: I can confirm that the Committee is the proper place to raise these matters. When Members get into Committee they will have an opportunity to suggest alternatives to the Secretary of State's procedural motion. It will be up to the Chairman of Ways and Means to consider the matter.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We understand what you are saying about standing order No. 34 and whether it may be more appropriate for the motion to be moved after you have left the Chair. However, I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that it is very much for you to give your view about the general conduct of the business today. I should like to re-emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that we are very much governed by procedure in the handling of Bills and that a major departure from the conventions is of great disservice to the House. That is what has happened on this occasion.

If complicated new amendments are tabled and made available only on Friday afternoon at 1 o'clock, it rules out all possibility of Opposition Members tabling amendments. Today we are dealing with a provisional selection of amendments that ends with clause 9. I submit that the matters raised in the complicated schedule alone deal with a large number of clauses long before clause 9 is reached. Therefore, the possibilities of amendment and debate of those serious matters are pre-empted if we proceed today.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, at least to give your view to the House as to the way in which the matter has been handled and whether, in your view, it is a matter with which we should proceed at this stage?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. Of course, he knows that the role of Mr. Speaker is to ensure that the matters raised are in order. It is not his role to express views on how matters have been handled so long as they are in order.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already advised the House that I have no authority to do this, and that I do not select the amendments for discussion in Committee. The House should proceed to the Committee stage, where that matter can properly be debated on the Secretary of State's motion.

Mr. Banks: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will accept the point of order.

Mr. Banks: I am sorry to have caused you so much anger, Mr. Speaker, by attempting to rise on a point of order. I should like you to accept my apologies immediately for having so concerned you.

However, the matter goes somewhat wider because it is a matter of order. The fact is that you have constantly told us—we have accepted it—that you are here to protect our rights as Back Benchers. The London borough of Newham is grievously damaged by the Bill. It could be argued that the Government are abusing the House by the way in which they are proceeding with the Bill. We are asking only for an opportunity to act as diligent Back Benchers, in order to protect the interests of those whom we represent. The point that I put to you, Mr. Speaker, is that we have not had a proper opportunity to do so.

Therefore, this is a matter of order, Mr. Speaker, and one upon which you can rule, because it touches upon our ability as hon. Members to protect and advance the interests of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker: There is no question of anger. I said what I did to the hon. Gentleman because he sought to interrupt me. The hon. Gentleman would not wish me to interrupt him.

I advise the hon. Gentleman and the House that I have no authority to do what is suggested. I do not select the amendments for a Committee stage; that is a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means, and for the Committee, when we get there. Therefore, there is no point in raising the matter with me at this stage.

Mr. Eric Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Weights and Measures (Carriage of Solid Fuel by Rail) Order 1987 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 4133/86 on the legal protection of original topographies of semi-conductor products be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

Considered in Committee

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

3.50 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Walker. I raised a point of order with Mr. Speaker and he suggested that it was more properly a matter for you. I understand that it would be in order for me to seek leave to move that you report progress and ask leave to sit again. I ask you to accept such a motion because the Government have consciously and deliberately breached the normal convention of our procedures by bringing a large number of amendments of a technical nature, some of considerable length — I have mentioned a new schedule of over 2,000 words—before the House at such a time as to make it impossible for hon. Members to seek any legal or financial advice about them. It was impossible because it was done over a weekend.

The nature of the amendments seems to make a significant difference to almost 25 per cent. of the Bill so that we are really being asked to consider a Bill that is different from that which received a Second Reading on Monday 12 January. It is a measure of the incompetence of the Department of the Environment that its view of what is required to clarify the law seems to change from day to day. The Secretary of State tabled the amendments on Thursday, as I emphasised, having given no indication on Second Reading that he had any intention of doing so and having given no such indication in a letter to me dated 14 January 1987 seeking agreement about the handling of the Local Government Finance Bill in Committee.

I put it to you, Mr. Walker, not only that it is unfair, a breach of our conventions and unacceptable procedure, but that it is unacceptable to the Committee that we should discuss today these matters that are so vital not only to Opposition Members but to the whole of local government, which is affected by the Bill. Such is the apparent panic in the Department that the Secretary of State has provided us, apparently generously, with notes on clauses to the Bill. However, the notes refer to the Bill without any of his amendments. Therefore, we do not know whether the notes are of any real value. They may be positively misleading. Further, the amendments that were tabled seek to amend two clauses which are subsequently deleted by further Government amendments. That is another measure of the haste and confusion with which the Government seek to change the law, apparently to clarify it.

Although the new schedule may be debated much later in our proceedings — I accept that — it directly and materially affects clause 1, which is the first clause we are asked to consider. I draw your attention, Mr. Walker, to page 143 of the Amendment Paper.

Therefore, I submit that there is a very strong case why you should accept my motion to terminate our proceedings, to report progress and to leave to sit again at an appropriate time by agreement through the usual channels. That will have given us and the local authorities the opportunity properly to consider the amendments and their implications.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Gentleman has asked that I accept the motion to report progress and ask leave to sit again. I have listened carefully to the exchanges that preceded the House going into Committee. In the light of what was said then and what has just been said, I believe that it would be wise of me to exercise my discretion, and it is my discretion to accept the motion. I assume that the hon. Gentleman's speech has been in support of the motion. Perhaps he might now move it formally.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful for your use of your discretion, Mr. Walker. I beg to move, That the Chairman do report progress and ask leave to sit again.

4 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I am happy to respond to the motion which you have accepted, Mr. Walker. However, I cannot advise the Committee to accept it. Perhaps I can allay some of the fears expressed by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

The hon. Gentleman will know that when I discussed the procedure motion with him—which he subsequently said was agreeable to him—I told him that a number of Government amendments would be tabled. Indeed, many of the Opposition amendments were tabled at the same time as the Government amendments. I see no reason why the Committee should not proceed to consider both the Opposition and Government amendments in their turn.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman will be relieved to know that the new schedule—which I agree is long and complex—simply replaces clauses 10 and 11 with some amendment thereto. He will realise that that is the last item to be taken in the manner in which the procedure motion is set out. Therefore, it is unlikely, in view of the number of amendments that must be covered before we reach Clause 9, that that schedule will be reached today. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman considers——

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: I want to finish my sentence. If the hon. Gentleman considers the selection list, he will discover that there are only three groups of Government amendments before the Committee today. Indeed, there are only four Government amendments on the first page. When we come to debate these amemdments—and it might help the hon. Gentleman if he considers the arguments—he may discover that they are minor and technical amendments simply intended to clarify and improve the drafting of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman has complained hitherto that the Government were slow to produce this legislation. I can assure him that the rush to introduce this legislation has meant further revisions suggested by leading and parliamentary counsel to clarify the purpose and meaning of the Bill.

Dr. Cunningham: I want the Secretary of State to consider carefully what he said. Will he confirm that at no time, in writing or in any other form, did he give notice to me or any of my hon. Friends that it was the Government's intention to table so many amendments? Will he also confirm that at no time did he give me any notice—verbally or in any other form — that one of the amendments would cover a full page of the Amendment Paper, as does Government Amendment No. 175 on page 138 or that a second amendment—a new schedule—as I have already emphasised, would run to two and a half pages of the Amendment Paper?

Does the Secretary of State accept that there was no notification of any such amendment? There could have been no agreement—although I accept that I gave my agreement orally in response to the Secretary of State's letter—if we had been told of the Secretary of State's intentions. Will the Secretary of State confirm the accuracy of my remarks? It is very important for future relations that he should do that.

The other general issue on this point is that it is a simple statement of truth that we have had no opportunity to consider the amendments. This is not a fabricated argument. No one in the House could possibly have absorbed the implications of the amendments in the time available to us. Therefore, we should not proceed at this point. I hope that the Secretary of State will at least confirm what I have said about the exchanges.

Mr. Ridley: I was glad to hear the hon. Gentleman confirm that I warned him that a number of Government amendments would be tabled.

Dr. Cunningham: Twister.

Mr. Ridley: I did not go into details about the number of amendments or their length. He has acknowledged my point that the amendments in no way change the substance of the Bill in any major fashion.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): How do we know?

Mr. Ridley: I have been explaining that to the hon. Member for Copeland. That point will be revealed when we debate the amendments. If the hon. Gentleman does not believe me, I hope that he will let the Committee proceed to consider the amendments and in due course what I have just said will be found to be the case.

It is not right that this urgent Bill, which is necessary if rate support grant is to be paid to local authorities, should be delayed. It is perfectly within the rules of Committee procedure, as the amendments were tabled on time, and I must stress that many of the Opposition amendments were tabled at the same time. I have not stinted to do the work necessary to consider the Opposition amendments and so to be able to respond perfectly properly to those amendments.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: I do not see why what is sauce for the goose should not be sauce for the gander in this case. I invite the Committe to proceed with the Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: I was hoping to catch the Secretary of State's eye before he finished his remarks, because I wanted to ask him whether his mind was made up in relation to his opposition to the motion. However uncomfortable we may find the fact, the Opposition accept that the Government will get their business through. That is the function of government. Indeed, the Government have the majority to add an eighth day to the week if they see fit to do so. Considering some of the Government's recent policies, I would not be at all surprised if that was a later motion.

Before we consider the Bill, the Secretary of State must accept that we want to consider the clauses and the

amendments to the clauses very carefully. This is not a time wasting effort by the Opposition. The Secretary of State may laugh at that, but I hope that he will accept my word on this occasion if on no other when I say that I want to ask him to give us a genuine opportunity to investigate and consider and consult our constituents, and especially the borough councils affected, about the full implications of the amendments that we have not had the opportunity to consider until now.

When the Secretary of State defended the position—which I agree that he inherited—that the procedures followed by local authorities and by his Department did not conform with the law, he said that it was in part the Opposition's fault for not spotting the deliberate mistake built into the legislation. Obviously we said that that was nonsense. It was not our fault. The Government govern and the Opposition oppose. However, there is something in the Secretary of State's point. If we had had more of an opportunity to consider the full implications of previous legislation, we might not have allowed the Government to make the mistake that they eventually made in the legislation that appeared on the statute book.

I put it to the Secretary of State, using his own argument, that this must be the opportunity for us to consult the borough councils — I am obviously concerned about Newham—to consider in some detail what the Government's amendments mean. We should then have an opportunity to parade our arguments and voice our feelings. I know that, in the end, we shall be voted down by the Government's majority, as they must get their business, but at least we could do justice to the arguments. I do not believe that the Secretary of State is giving us ample opportunity to do that.

Everybody accepts that local government finance is getting into such a morass that not one hon. Member can honestly say that he or she understands the current system, how it operates and how it would truly be changed by the Bill. I have been in local government for 16 years and I have a great deal of feeling for it, but I would not suggest that I understand everything in the Bill. Although we are here to oppose, we are in a way party to legislation which the House passes, and it is up to us to try to spot the defects. I should not like to be party to yet another piece of legislation that makes it that much more difficult to understand how local government finance works.

The Secretary of State should talk to the Leader of the House. That does not require a great deal of physical effort on his part, as his right hon. Friend is sitting right next to him. How can we have any confidence that, when the Bill is enacted, it will not be faulty in some way and therefore lead to even more confusion in local government? I ask the Secretary of State with whatever persuasive powers I have —I know that I have very few with him, and I would not want it to be any different—to think carefully and accept the motion in the interests of good order, the House, local government and good legislation, although we disagree, root and branch, with the Bill.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Exceptionally, you, Mr. Walker, have exercised a discretion that is conferred on you to accept the motion moved by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that you should report progress and ask leave to sit again.

One might think that the progress which the Committee would be able to report would be scant, but the Committee is not more likely to accept the motion as a result of the speech made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is not a particularly creditable example of the wisdom of those people who have been engaged in local government.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who is normally scrupulously fair, has acknowledged that he tabled amendments on the same day as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tabled amendments. The hon. Gentleman is saying that the well-known and respected procedures of the House, which allow amendments to be tabled on a Thursday if they are to be considered by the Committee the following Monday, should be set aside in respect of this Bill and this Committee stage.

One week ago today, the House gave the Bill a Second Reading with a substantial majority. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State commended the Bill to the House, he did so on the basis that it would put the law into the condition which everybody, including the hon. Member for Copeland, believe it to be in.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): That is not true.

4.15 pm

Mr. Gow: Oh yes. It was my right hon. Friend and his advisers who discovered that the previous legislation did not have the effect that Parliament intended it to have.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ms. Clare Short *rose*——

Mr. Gow: I wish to develop my argument. I shall give way a little later.

The Bill's purpose was fully explained to the House and the House agreed and gave it a Second Reading. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now being criticised because he has tabled amendments which you, Mr. Walker, have studied more closely than any other right hon. or hon. Member—with the sole exception of my right hon. Friend which you decided were in order and which you selected.

Of course it is open to the Opposition to move that you report progress and ask leave to sit again, Mr. Walker, but Conservative Members are entitled to say that everything which my right hon. Friend has done, including the tabling of amendments last Thursday, is wholly in order.

Mr. Tony Banks: We are not saying that it is out of order.

Mr. Gow: As the Opposition claimed on Second Reading that they would subject the whole Bill and, therefore, no doubt, possible amendments to it, to the most rigorous scrutiny one might have expected that the hon. Member for Copeland, who is a doctor, would have examined the amendments even before my right hon. Friend tabled them.

On Second Reading, the Opposition Front Bench said that it would subject the Bill to the utmost scrutiny. That being so, it might have subjected potential amendments to the most rigorous scrutiny. We have a most bizarre spectacle. The Opposition said that they would study the Bill closely, but they are unable to give due consideration to amendments which my right hon. Friend tabled on Thursday—the same day on which the hon. Member for Copeland tabled his amendments. We have not heard my

[Mr. Gow]

right hon. Friend whinge to the House because he has not had time to study the Opposition's amendments, which also were tabled last Thursday. On the contrary, my right hon. Friend, dragging himself away from the——

Dr. Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: Or course I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I would otherwise call my hon. Friend.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and apologise for having had to leave the Chamber briefly, with the result that I missed his earlier remarks.

Why should it matter when the Opposition tabled their amendments? It is not us who are seeking agreement on a timetable for how we proceed, but the Government. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Secretary of State should have been, dare I say, candid or honest about his intentions when he wrote to me rather than behave as he did?

Mr. Gow: It may just be that I have known my right hon. Friend a little longer even than the hon. Gentleman. Throughout the time that I have known my right hon. Friend, I have found him to be totally candid and honest at all times and in all circumstances. Therefore, I reject——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): That is not what the courts said.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman must not rebuke my right hon. Friend because, on occasions, the courts have disagreed with him. That does not reflect upon my right hon. Friend's honesty and candour. If the Labour party seeks to rebuke my right hon. Friend on the grounds that he has been lacking in candour, it should recall that it was my right hon. Friend who came to the House to say that previous legislation did not have the effects hoped for by the whole House, including the Labour party.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). Earlier I attempted to interrupt when the hon. Gentleman said that the Bill would put back the law to what everybody thought it was. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not present a week ago today when my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said that, if that was all that the Bill would do, there would not be any great controversy. We believe —this has been admitted by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—that the Bill does a great deal more that is prejudicial to local government and the effect of any amendment is likely to be deleterious to local government. It requires the degree of scrutiny and consultation for which we are now asking.

Mr. Gow: I readily concede that the hon. Gentleman is right—the Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend has a twin purpose. It is, first, to restore the law to that which the House and the other place intended when the legislation was passed in 1980. Its second purpose, which will be immensely welcomed by those, like myself, who live in the Soviet republic of Lambeth, is to give certain further protection to innocent ratepayers — *[Interruption.]* During the week I happen to live in Lambeth and as a ratepayer I am entitled, along with the great majority of other ratepayers in Lambeth, to say that we welcome the other proposals in my right hon. Friend's Bill that will give further protection to ratepayers. Many ratepayers in Lambeth are absolutely scandalised by some of the expenditure incurred by that council.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Will the hon. Gentleman specify what excesses he is talking about? Is he aware that last week the boroughs of Lambeth and Camden and other Labour-held boroughs did a great deal to make provision for the elderly and others——

The Chairman: Order. I think it would be unwise for the Committee to start talking about such matters. They are not the subject of the Question before the Committee.

Mr. Gow: I would be very happy, if I catch your eye during the later Committee stages, to give a list of the quite outrageous expenditure incurred by Lambeth borough council——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Tell us about Eastbourne.

Mr. Gow: We are not talking about Eastbourne——

The Chairman: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) will have equal regard to the remark that I addressed to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland). We shall see what is permissible when we come to the later stages of the Bill, but for now I hope that we shall stick to the Question before the Committee.

Mr. Gow: I submit myself entirely to your ruling, Mr. Walker and I shall refer to the expenditure of Lambeth on a later occasion.

It has been agreed, even by the Opposition Front Bench, that it was, in every respect, wholly in order for my right hon. Friend to table the amendments that he did on Thursday. Over the weekend, the Opposition have had time — the time scale has been followed on many occasions—to consider those amendments. On the same day, Thursday, the Opposition tabled a number of amendments to the Bill. It is perfectly proper that the Committee should now embark on a due consideration of those parts of the Bill that are down for discussion today.

I hope that the Committee will reject the motion moved, most unwisely, by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). The Bill ought to be on the statute book at the earliest possible moment. We ought to embark on the Committee stage today as envisaged. I hope that the Committee will reject the advice of the Labour party.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I support the motion moved by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). The Opposition House consists of a number of Opposition parties. It may be that there are some critics on the Conservative Benches. I hope that there are, because many Conservative local authorities will find themselves in severe difficulties if this legislation goes through.

The exigencies of the electoral system dictate that there should be one spokesman from the alliance in this debate. That does not mean that the matters before us are any the less important. There are a number of Ministers present with their parliamentary private secretaries — the Box can hardly contain all the officials here to support the Ministers. There are also a number of spokesmen present for the official Opposition.

The Government have tabled a whole series of amendments of the utmost complexity and it has been

exceptionally difficult to find enough advice in time to debate them effectively today. It is not just a question whether we have been able to consider those amendments over the weekend. In common with other right hon. and hon. Members I received a letter today from the Association of County Councils that stated:

"The Government has also tabled a large number of amendments. It has been impossible in the short time available to analyse these in detail."

Yet here we are this afternoon expected to debate matters before us not because of any culpability on the part of the Opposition parties but because the Government got the legislation wrong. I should have thought that the Government, in the light of their experience, would have been rather more humble in coming before the House with all these complicated amendments. The list of selected amendments is one and a half pages long—and it goes up to only clause 9. There are 34 pages of amendments — some 200 amendments and new clauses. That is hardly conducive to the kind of detailed discussion and debate that Opposition parties and the House have a legitimate right to expect on such matters.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is right in the sense that we are seeking to put back the law to what we thought it was, but that is only part of it. It is generally accepted that if this Bill was limited to that purpose we would have readily accepted it and allowed it to to go through without any difficulty. However, the Secretary of State has once again used the threat that if this legislation does not go through there will be problems for local authorities with regard to the rate support grant.

This Bill contains many provisions that seek to introduce a great deal of uncertainty for local authorities —they will not be able to rely on their budgeting for next year because of what may have happened over the last five years—and it is somewhat rich and ironic for the right hon. Gentleman to say that it is uncertain what will happen to RSG if this Bill is delayed.

If the Secretary of State's sole concern is to find a way of bringing the RSG settlement before this House, he should have discussions with the usual channels. Those channels would be quite happy to have an interim settlement decided upon and that would make the local authorities happier in their belief that something constructive was being done about their problems.

It is not just Opposition Members who have brought these matters forward in previous discussions. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Acton (Sir. G. Young) is not in the Chamber. On Second Reading, as a former Minister in the Department of the Environment, the hon. Gentleman admitted that he did not understand the complexities of the RSG. He said that the more he tried to do so, the less grasp of the subject he retained.

If a Minister can say that, it is certainly not on for the Government to put before the House a whole series of highly complex new amendments, new clauses and schedules to the Bill and to expect us to debate them in a comprehensive and intelligent way.

Therefore, I hope that it will be possible to have the opportunity to consider the amendments in more detail and to secure the professional advice that we admit that we need to debate such matters thoroughly. I wish to consult those local authorities that my party has the honour to control, including the local authority of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). I wish to discover their views.

I hope that it will be possible to have such an opportunity. I hope that we shall not have bitterness developing over something which is crucial to many people in this country and which affects the finance and constitutional position of local government. Many of us on the Opposition side had the honour of serving for many years in local government and do not wish to see further legislation which will require more Bills and amendments and raise more legal problems. I beg the Committee to give us more time to consider the matter.

4.30 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I appeal to the Committee to support the motion because of the serious implications that the amendments will have for local government. We should have an opportunity to consider the amendments and especially the new schedule. I should like to consult the authorities that I represent, Wakefield and Leeds, because both are involved and will be affected by the proposed legislation.

Amendment No. 175 on page 138 of the Amendment Paper mentions information. It changes the old concept of the 1980 Act about information. It is important that we get this matter right in the first instance. If local government is required to supply information to the Secretary of State on the basis of which the Secretary of State would give judgment and perhaps act upon, it is right and fair that the local authorities should have an opportunity to consider the implications of this amendment.

Hon. Members have not had an opportunity to consult the local authorities that we represent and in which we are involved, and the local authority associations have not had an opportunity to give advice or to put their views on these amendments and the new schedule. It is important that, before we introduce any new legislation about information to be provided by local authorities to the Department of the Environment or, in particular, to the Secretary of State, the local authorities and their organisations should have an opportunity to consider in more detail and in depth the amendments and their legal implications.

The new schedule mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland is causing great worry to local authorities. It specifically refers to the rate support grant and its special provisions. It also mentions consultation. If we are to have legislation affecting local authorities and the provision of rate support grant, it is only fair and just that those local authorities should have an opportunity to consult hon. Members about the implications of the new schedule.

Against this backcloth of the history of the Government's attack on local government, the motion is correct and should be supported. I hope that the Secretary of State, Conservative Members and the Government will see the importance of the consultation that should take place about the acquiring of information from local authorities. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Government will accept that there is a need for further examination of the new schedule, because of its implications for local authorities, and especially for the local authorities in west Yorkshire that I mentioned.

I ask the Committee to support the motion. We should allow the business to be so conducted that we can discuss the new schedule in detail and can return after consultations with our local authorities and with the local

[Mr. William O'Brien]

authority associations. If we had such consultations, we could obtain all the information that we require in order properly to discuss the schedule and the amendments.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I support the motion. It is clear that we have to protect the procedures of the House and the Committee. I fully appreciate that the Secretary of State is keen to turn everything to do with rates into a farce and to try to convince the country that rates are in such a muddle and a mess that it will be possible for the Government to abolish them without much opposition. That is one of his political aims and he has managed to continue to show so many problems about rates that that would go some way towards supporting his argument.

Any competent Secretary of State could produce a formula for sorting out the rate support grant which would demonstrate that the rating system works. His purpose in trying to discredit the rate system is political. The trouble with his Bill is that not only is it trying to discredit the whole rating process, it is in danger of discrediting the House. At this stage we ought to be very worried about the procedures of the House.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) suggested that we were following precedent. Many of my hon. Friends have a lot of sympathy for the hon. Member. He is one of the few former members of the Government to resign on a matter of principle. I have sympathy for that, but we wonder where his future lies. One or two of us who have listened to his speeches recently think that perhaps he is trying to creep back.

Mr. Dobson: Whether he was going backwards or forwards, he was creeping.

Mr. Bennett: The alternative, of course, is that perhaps the hon. Gentleman sees his way to becoming part of the Chairman's Panel or developing in some way like that. Following his explanation of procedures, we should be wary of seeing him make progress in that direction.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that we were following normal procedure. Let us be clear. It is extremely rare for a rates Bill to be taken in all its stages on the Floor of the House. Almost always, such Bills go into Committee upstairs and there are very good reasons for that. The normal advantage for a Bill going through Committee is that it tends to take rather longer and the opportunities for detailed scrutiny are considerable. In addition, there is a considerable time between each of the stages. Therein lies the problem that has been introduced by this legislation.

Not so long ago the Bill was given a Second Reading. People outside did not have much opportunity to read the original Bill. On Thursday and Friday the amendments started to appear in large numbers on the Order Paper. If this Bill were going to Committee upstairs, the odds are that the first sitting would be tomorrow. Perhaps the Committee would get through the first group of amendments, and, if there was goodwill and a desire to make reasonable progress, it could possibly get through the second group. Therefore, people outside would have until about Thursday to consider most of the Bill.

People could probably expect the Committee to sit for up to four or five weeks if it was relatively non-controversial. At the end of the Committee's proceedings there would be an opportunity to consider how much progress had been made and to prepare amendments for Report stage. That means that people outside would have considerable time in which to analyse the legislation, look carefully at the problems and bring forward their amendments. That is not what the Government intend. They are insisting that we debate the legislation today and that the amendments should be considered now.

Let us suppose that some valid points are raised. When must we table amendments for Report? The Government have not yet made it clear when they intend to take the legislation to Report. The implication is that the Government intend to take Report stage at some time on Wednesday. If the public want to consider the amendments made to the Bill and come forward with suggestions for Report stage they will have to produce them by tomorrow. It is totally out of keeping with the normal procedures of the House, which are to provide a reasonable period for scrutiny so that hon. Members can be well briefed and the public can adequately and accurately discuss the legislation.

The legislation is being rushed through. The House has a bad reputation for rushing through legislation. It is no good for hon. Members to claim that they are giving scrutiny to legislation if it is rushed through in this way. We shall simply run into interpretation problems in the courts or problems with the statutory instruments that arise from legislation. It is our fault if we allow legislation to be rushed through. That is why we should give careful consideration to the motion and consider whether we should say to the Government that we want adequate time in which to scrutinise the legislation, not only for the sake of our constituents and local authorities but for the reputation of the House, which should be concerned to pass good legislation.

I challenge the Secretary of State to tell us how quickly he thinks that Government Departments can get advice on the detailed legal meaning of clauses. Last week, the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments examined the problems that we encountered with the social security legislation. It took nearly nine months for that legislation to go through the House. It had full scrutiny. One group of amendments was accepted at a fairly late stage in the other place, and the Government are in the process of turning it into a statutory instrument. Quite clearly, they have run into difficulties with that statutory instrument. When the Scrutiny Committee asked for a memorandum, the Government asked for a fortnight in which to get legal advice. If the Government need a fortnight in which to get legal advice on a statutory instrument arising out of legislation, surely, with a complicated Bill such as this, Opposition Members should have a reasonable amount of time in which to take advice. Not only Opposition Members but local authority associations and individual local councils need to take advice to determine whether some hidden implications may cause difficulties for them.

4.45 pm

At the moment, all we have is the Secretary of State's statement that there is nothing unacceptable in the amendments. Of course, his record is not good. The courts have ruled against him four times. It appears that, on those occasions, he got the advice wrong. He did not quite understand the legislation. Of course, he knew about the problems with this legislation, so he told us, several months before he confided in the House and told us that

we needed legislation. Part of the blame for the rush is his. It is his fault for not bringing forward the legislation and not telling the House about it earlier.

There are unprecedented powers in the legislation. On this occasion, the Secretary of State says that we are legislating not only to allow judges to interpret the legislation but to stop judges interpreting the legislation. The Secretary of State may be able to tell us that there are many precedents for this, but I have been told by one or two of my hon. Friends that we must refer back several centuries to find an occasion on which a Minister introduced legislation to disfranchise judges. A few people would say that we do not want judges interfering in interpreting legislation. I should have thought that the Conservative party could see only too clearly the dangers of legislating judges out of their role in interpreting the law. It seems to be extremely dangerous.

That is a totally new element in the legislation as far as rates are concerned. It is one of the reasons why we should give this legislation much more adequate scrutiny than will be possible if the Government insist on rushing it through, taking only a fortnight from the time of the Second Reading to the point at which the Government hope that it will leave the House and head for the other place.

The Government have a majority and, more or less, can steamroll anything through the House of Commons. I suggest that the Government should think carefully about steamrolling tactics. They have encouraged people in the other place to realise that there are constitutional problems and to spend much more time examining legislation. If the Government do not take notice of the dilatory motion today, Members of the other place will be tempted to take a long time to scrutinise the legislation. They have a duty not only to scrutinise those parts of the Bill that re-establish the status quo — as everyone believed it was — but to look at those parts that introduce new principles such as opting judges out of interpreting legislation.

The other place should seriously consider amending the legislation so that it merely re-establish the status quo, and take out these new powers and insist that they are properly and fully scrutinised within the normal procedures of the House. That involves about eight or nine months, from Second Reading to a proper Committee stage, to a Report stage and to the remaining proceedings.

I strongly urge the Committee to support this procedural motion and to allow the proper consultation necessary to pass good legislation.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): I support this motion for two reasons, but, first, I press the Secretary of State on one specific point. The Secretary of State, during his response to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), told the Committee that on Thursday he informed my hon. Friend that it was the Government's intention to table a number of amendments to the Bill. If the Secretary of State says that he gave that information to my hon. Friend, I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will accept his assurance. I suspect that the Secretary of State chooses his words with care. When he told the House that he said to my hon. Friend that it was his intention to table a number of amendments, I asked him to tell us whether those were the words he used to my hon. Friend. Indeed, did the Secretary of State say that he would table a number of amendments or did he give the impression to my hon. Friend that it would be only a few amendments? There is a difference between, on the one hand, tabling three, four or five amendments and, on the other hand, tabling 38 amendments and new clauses last Thursday evening. The Secretary of State owes the Committee a full explanation. He should be more candid with us.

I refer to the reasons for supporting the motion moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland. Copies of these amendments and new clauses were not available until Friday afternoon. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) that it is in order for amendments to be tabled on a Thursday evening, to appear on the Order Paper on Friday morning and to be debated on Monday. There is no disagreement on that point. The hon. Member for Eastbourne is absolutely correct, but there was a difference in the procedure last Friday.

For whatever reason, the amendments were not available on Friday morning. On several occasions, I went to the Vote Office for the latest issue of amendments to the Bill. I take a particular interest in the Bill because it affects the city of Birmingham, and I represent part of the city of Birmingham. I took part in the Second Reading debate. I was interested to discover what amendments were to be tabled. Indeed, I tabled an amendment on Thursday evening, and I wanted to check that it was printed accurately. The Notice Paper was not available on Friday morning. I went to the Vote Office several times and asked for it. My hon. Friends told me that the Notice Paper became available about one o'clock or slightly thereafter, approximately the time at which the House was about to divide on the private Member's Bill.

It was not possible for Opposition Members to consult their advisers, particularly the officers employed by the local authorities, in their constituencies on Friday. It was only this morning that we saw the large number of amendments that had been tabled by the Government. It is an argument not about whether it is in order but about whether it is appropriate and right for the Committee to debate amendments of such scale and significance on a Monday when they were not available at a reasonable time on the previous Friday. I ask the hon. Member for Eastbourne, whose approach is usually fair, to reconsider his earlier remarks. He asked whether this was in order. There is no argument about that. Of course it is in order. But is it right to proceed in this way? That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland did not raise it as a point of order. Instead he has moved a procedural motion that we should now report progress so that these amendments can be considered by both sides of the Committee and given the scrutiny that they deserve.

I support my hon. Friend's motion because the scrutiny of this Bill is especially important as it has been brought before the Committee by this Secretary of State. On 16 December 1986 he complained that the Opposition should have picked up the loopholes in legislation. He said that they should have scrutinised the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 more carefully. It does not lie in the mouth of this Secretary of State, therefore, to rush legislation through the House of Commons and subsequently to complain if there are further loopholes. On 16 December 1986 the Secretary of State said:

"The hon. Gentleman had some fun with his adjectives, but let me ask him what scrutiny he gave to the 1980—"

and then he was interrupted. He continued:

"It takes me to do not only my job but the Opposition's job in pointing out what Parliament failed to stop in 1980."

[Mr. Terry Davis]

Will a future Secretary of State come to the House in six or seven years' time and complain that this Bill was not adequately scrutinised in 1987? Supported as usual in his vocal, articulate and vociferous manner by the hon. Member for Eastbourne, the Secretary of State complained that the Opposition had not picked up the deficiencies in the previous legislation. He said:

"Every hon. Member is in breach of the law in this regard for not having drawn attention to the deficiencies in the system."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1053-1057.]

We do not intend to be told in six or seven years' time that we have not drawn attention to the deficiencies in this new system. The amendments and clauses have been tabled by the Government at a very late stage. I ask the hon. Member for Eastbourne to withdraw his remarks. Usually he is very fair. Why is he seeking to obfuscate the issue in this way?

I make no secret of my views about the Bill. It is a shabby Bill, but it is not necessary for the Government to behave in such a shabby way.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The Secretary of State seeks to oppose the motion. Most hon. Members believe that he must do a great deal more explaining before he is able to convince the Committee of the appropriateness of proceeding with the debate this afternoon. I hope that we shall have a proper reply from him before there is a vote on the motion.

Mr. Ridley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State has no intention of replying to the debate, Mr. Walker. Are we to anticipate a reply from the Minister of State, or is this another example of the way in which this Government behave—that they never seek to reply to debates? Is there to be a reply by the Leader of the House? It is most unusual for there to be a procedural motion but no ministerial reply. The Secretary of State told us that the amendments that were put down on Friday involve no substantial change to the Bill and that therefore we could debate this matter.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Walker. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) asked a rhetorical question concerning a ministerial reply to the motion. Can you help me? In Committee it is usual for there to be a reply from a Minister or for there to be a specific intimation by the Minister that he does not intend to reply. Is it possible to discover that now? Unless we do so now, my hon. Friend may be talking to thin air. Are we to have a reply from the Minister?

The Chairman: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, that is not a matter for me. However, my impression is that from a sedentary position the Secretary of State suggested that he had no intention of responding to the debate.

Mr. Straw: The Committee will note — [HON. MEMBERS: "Shameful."] Yes, it is shameful. The Committee will draw the conclusion that the Secretary of State accepts that the case lies with us. Since this is the Committee stage, I know that you will confirm, Mr. Walker, that the Secretary of State does not need the leave of the Committee to speak again. It is a gross abuse of the accepted conventions of the Committee for there to be a debate, albeit one that the Secretary of State did not wish to have, and for him to refuse to reply to it. If the Secretary of State were to turn round and look at the faces of his hon. Friends, he would see that he is picking up no brownie points by treating the Committee in this arrogant way.

In support of the arrogant way in which he has behaved, the Secretary of State said that the amendments involve no substantial change to the Bill. There are four reasons why we should not accept the Secretary of State's word. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made clear, the Opposition were given no notice of the nature of these amendments. I am glad that the Secretary of State admitted that during the discussions through the usual channels no details of the amendments were given and that the clear impression was given that there would be a few technical amendments of the kind that have always been accepted on any Bill.

The second reason for not accepting the Secretary of State's word that there is nothing in these amendments is that he told us today that long and complex amendments to existing clauses were tabled only last Friday and that two clauses have been replaced. Given the notice that the Opposition have had so far, it is impossible for the Committee properly to decide in what respect those clauses have been amended and to divine their complexity. Even if the Opposition could accept the good faith of Ministers, we know to our cost that undertakings given by Ministers about the nature of legal provisions are of no value after a Bill has become law. Some of us dealt with the Local Government Bill. We should not be in this position if ministerial undertakings as to the meaning of legislation had turned out to be correct. Some of us remember that only 18 months ago Ministers gave undertakings about the way in which the Local Government Bill would impact on the information practices of local authorities, but its impact has been wholly different and restrictive.

The third reason why we cannot accept the Secretary of State's word is that we have been here before and discovered that his word cannot be relied upon. On 16 December the Secretary of State told the House:

"The Bill is designed to make no changes in policy, but as far as possible to apply existing policy within a tight timetable."

In answer to an intervention from the previous Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), he said:

"We are merely validating the past and putting right for the future the position that the whole House thought obtained."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1051-54.]

We were told that that was all that the Bill would contain. However, we find that the Bill contains major policy changes. The hon. Member for Eastbourne was at least right about that, but what he said was wholly different from what the Secretary of State told us: that authorities are retrospectively penalised because £38 million is to be taken away from 12 authorities, including Birmingham and Cambridge; that the appeal procedure in the Rates Act 1984, which was laid down in this House by Conservative Members only three years ago, is to be abandoned for this year; and, above all, that by this Bill the Secretary of State seeks to put himself wholly above the law.

I do not know whether Conservative Members have read clause 4(6) or clause 6(4). I ask them to reflect on the

words used. The Secretary of State gives himself the power to provide that decisions which he makes under clause 6(4) shall have effect

"notwithstanding any decision of a court (whether before or after the passing of this Act) purporting to have a contrary effect."

Conservative Members are learned in the law. Can they think of any Act in peacetime in which a Secretary of State has sought to give himself immunity from the law in this way?

5 pm

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. Gentleman poses a question on interpretation of the Act and the validity of particular sections. What Conservative Members feel about the Opposition's tactics in relation to the motion is this. Of the 20 authorities that have been ratecapped or are to be ratecapped, 19 are controlled by the Labour party, and one by the alliance parties, affecting about 5·5 million people. The people who are resident in those local authority areas look to the House and the Bill for protection. The Opposition are endeavouring to divert criticism of those local authorities for the spending, social and housing policies that they have pursued. That is the motive of the debate this afternoon.

Mr. Straw: By his silence on the point the hon. Gentleman has confirmed that there is no precedent in peacetime for a Secretary of State placing himself above the law in this way. If the hon. Gentleman were on the Opposition Benches, he and his hon. Friends would be rightly ferocious in their attack upon any Labour Minister seeking to set himself above the law. If the hon. Gentleman applies himself to the clause, he will see that it is not just a matter of the Secretary of State validating past acts—that is provided for by clause 4(1), and that we accept within the framework of the Bill. Having validated past acts, the Secretary of State then seeks to place himself wholly above the law, immune from any possibility of court action.

In our judgment, there is no precedent in peacetime for such a procedure since the Bill of Rights in 1688. The purpose of that constitutional settlement was to place Ministers under the control and supervision of the High Court of Parliament. This Bill sets an extremely dangerous precedent, involving a fundamental change of policy, which was not hinted at when the Secretary of State came before the House on 16 December.

The fourth reason why we cannot accept the Secretary of State's explanation is that it is patent that he, even if he had good faith, has no grip on or grasp of local government finance or the Bill. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), the Secretary of State said:

"The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong. I am the only person who is quite certain what the law is."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1055.]

For the Secretary of State the law is a moving target.

We have been in a situation where the Secretary of State presented a Bill, apparently to clarify and state the law as he says everybody knew that it once was. He then sought to table amendments to clauses 10 and 11. Now he wants to delete them. Today, to assist the House, we have been provided with notes on clauses 10 and 11, which are now to be deleted. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for providing us with notes on clauses that will not exist, but he has failed to provide us with notes on schedules that will replace those clauses that will no longer exist.

The Secretary of State is not directly responsible for the initial chaos into which local government finance has been plunged by successive Conservative Secretaries of State, but he has made the situation worse.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne said that standard procedures had been followed. That is not correct, because this is a technical Bill. Every other technical local government finance Bill, as with the technical parts of every finance Bill, is debated upstairs. It is ludicrous for a Committee of the whole House to debate the minutiae of local government finance. Were the Bill debated upstairs, Ministers would give notice of their intention to amend a Bill in this way, and many more than two days would have been allowed.

The amendments are substantial. The definition of expenditure is changed by amendment No. 6; the way in which principles of accounting are applied to local authorities is changed by amendment No. 153; information requirements for local authorities are changed by one amendment to the schedule. There is a whole new schedule that changes the rate support grant procedures and abrogates the requirements on the Secretary of State to consult local authorities. It disregards other matters. There is a half page on the ways in which the teachers' pay settlement is to be dealt with. The Secretary of State says there is nothing new in this, but there are new matters and we need more than half a working day to take advice upon them.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland, the Secretary of State admitted that he has known about this farrago since last September. He now comes to the House and says that the matter is urgent. If he had had any sensibility to the views of the House, and any wish to have this matter dealt with urgently and expeditiously, he would have come to us when he got the Attorney-General's advice in October and told us that there was a problem, that he wanted to put it right, but did not want to change the law in any substantive way and asked us to agree a procedure for dealing with this. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland has made clear, we would have agreed to look at the draft and the Bill could have gone through on the nod without any of this.

Instead, the Secretary of State has sued the excuse of legal defects to ambush the House into accepting new and wholly unacceptable changes to local government finance. At the latest stage he has tried to ambush us again. It is unacceptable; this ambush cannot and must not work. I support the motion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Chairman: The Committee has had a fair run at this and the issue is very clear. I should have thought that the Committee was in a position to reach a conclusion. If hon. Members persist, I have no option but to call them, but I hope that they will bear in mind what I have said.

Mr. Spearing: The powerful points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Shaw) have emphasised the behaviour of the Secretary of State, who I hope will not depart because I have personal criticisms to make of him. It is quite clear that in every respect his behaviour over the Bill has shown his contempt of parliamentary procedures.

I thought that all hon. Members believed in parliamentary democracy; that it was almost a sine qua non of becoming a Member of this place. How the right

[Mr. Spearing]

hon. Gentleman can go to the electors of Cirencester and Tewkesbury at the next election and ask to be returned as their Member of Parliament when he has so treated all Members of Parliament — there were criticisms from others on Second Reading—defies all logic.

The reason for the motion, Mr. Walker, which you have allowed to be put, illustrates the abuse of the place by the Secretary of State. A dilatory motion is a safety valve. The Chair will not allow a dilatory motion to be moved unless there has been an irregularity. That is in the Standing Orders — you will correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Walker—but there has been a hiccup. There is an overwhelming case for interrupting the normal business of the House to allow debate on the Adjournment so that dissatisfaction can be aired. The fact that you, Mr. Walker, have permitted the debate is a sign that in your judgment, and indeed on any objective test, there has been a parliamentary irregularity.

Conservative Members have no need to smile. Before the Bill was published, two or three deputations from the London borough of Newham had discussions in good faith with the Secretary of State. The Bill destroys all those discussions and everything that went on in a proper manner. It is because of that sort of distrust that the motion has been moved tonight.

I asked six questions during a speech made almost a week ago to the hour. I asked five factual questions and one of opinion to be answered that night by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, and, if he could not do so then, to be answered by the end of last week. No letter was received. This morning, I telephoned the Secretary of State's Private Office and half an hour ago I received a letter from the Minister for Local Government. Does the hon. Gentleman—I ask him because he still may have a chance to sum up — think that that is correct parliamentary procedure since five of my questions related to matters of fact, no opinion? They related to the London borough of Newham, which stands to lose £33 million as a result of the Bill and £6 million, pro rata, from the education budget for next year.

I want to talk to my town hall officials about the new amendments. I want to ask them about the estimates in the Minister's letter. Because of the timing and the way in which the Government have behaved, I have not had the opportunity to do so. That is why you, Mr. Walker, are justified in letting us debate the matter.

The Government's behaviour in respect of local government is a matter for debate on the Floor of the House. We think that it is pretty bad. But the Government's provable behaviour in respect of this legislation is completely unparliamentary and smacks of totalitarian attitudes. It is unworthy of any person who calls himself a democrat.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I, too, shall be brief as I agree with all the points made by my hon. Friends in support of the motion. The reasons have been put fairly clearly.

I want to talk about consultation. Some of my hon. Friends have said that the Secretary of State has treated hon. Members and parliamentary procedure with contempt. I am worried about that, but I am even more worried by the cynical disregard for the democratic process and for local authority officers and councillors who have come to see the Secretary of State or his Ministers in the past few months. Some delegations have been completely ignored. No difference seems to have been made by all the facts that have been laid before the Secretary of State and his Ministers. The Minister listened keenly to the delegation from Sheffield while the Bill was being printed across the road. So much for the democratic process, which is being exploited with cynical disregard.

5.15 pm

I do not believe that the Secretary of State understands the Bill's implications. If he does understand them, he obviously dislikes local government so much that he is prepared to push it through despite the damage that it is likely to do. The Government should respect the crucial work of local government. I still maintain that local government is the bedrock of democracy in Britain. I still maintain that it actively expresses, yearly, the views of Britain's electorate. I still maintain that it protects local people, and, in particular, poor people, from the abuses of Government, even though the Government seem to accuse local government of abuses. I still maintain that without the safety valve of local government there would be even more disillusionment about parliamentary democracy.

Therefore, more time is needed for consultation, not just so that we can learn, but so that the Secretary of State can learn the damage that is likely to be done to local government if the Bill goes through unscathed. We need that extra time and I hope that we shall win the vote tonight in order to obtain that extra time for the sake of democracy and local government generally.

Mr. Dobson: Whatever functions I or any other hon. Member may attempt to carry out in the House, our primary function is to attempt to represent and protect the interests of the people who elected us. This debate is not some shallow procedural wrangle. It is about the capacity of hon. Members, at least on the Labour Benches, to go about their proper business of trying to discover what impact the Bill's proposals and its amendments are likely to have on the lives of the people whom we were elected to represent. In the short time that has been available to us it has been impossible for any of us to find out what the Bill's impact is likely to be.

If I think of my constituency, with the shivering streets in which the people whom I represent are living, I do not know what the impact of these measures will be. I suspect that they will mean reductions in meals on wheels for old and handicapped people. I suspect that there will be less money for luncheon clubs for old and handicapped people. I suspect that less money will be available for trying to cope with the thousands of homeless people in my constituency. But I do not know, because I have not had time to look at the proposals in detail and to consult the people who can advise me. As an inner London Member, I to some extent have to represent, or try to represent, in the House, the interest of the children, young people and adults who depend on the Inner London education authority for their education. That authority worked hard and quickly to brief me on what the Bill's proposals may do to its ability to provide an education for my children, my neighbours' children and my constituents' children, but it has not yet been able to provide a briefing on the impact of the Government's amendments and new schedule.

It is impossible for me properly to discharge my primary duty as a Member of Parliament to scrutinise the

legislation and to try to measure its impact on the people whom I try, inadequately, to represent. There are people who say that the shouting at Prime Minister's Question Time, or various yah-booing activities in this place, bring the House into disrepute. That is trivial in comparison with the way that this sort of cavalier treatment of the House brings it into disrepute. We were sent here to represent our constituents. One of our duties is to scrutinise legislation and the Government's proposition today, and their opposition to the motion, is guaranteed to bring the House into disrepute. We shall be a disreputable body if we let this go through.

I say to the few Conservative Members who have bothered to listen to any of the debate that when, after the next general election, it is their turn to sit on the Opposition Benches, they should not moan to us if they think that we are pushing things through too quickly. If Conservative Members vote today to treat us in this way —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) says that this has been done before. Although he is a lawyer, he apparently does not realise that there has never been an occasion when the House has been asked to pass a Bill which, in advance, exempted a Secretary of State from scrutiny in the High Court. That has not been done before and we do not want it done now. Conservative Members should remember that they may live and learn.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): The two main thrusts of the argument have been adequately and eloquently covered by my hon. Friends. As we all know, scrutiny for us means consultation with people more expert than we on legal matters. That has been impossible on these amendments. The Committee will know that for the past 12 months I have sought, to the best of my ability, to do my duty by the London borough of Brent, part of which I have the honour to represent. That borough is profoundly affected, not only by the Bill, but by the latest lot of amendments. For the first time in 28 years, I am unable to have the expert advice that I need on amendments.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), I tried to get copies of the amendments on Friday, but could not get them until this morning. As always, I have been in close contact with the London borough of Brent and in particular on this matter with the director of finance. I sent him a copy of *Hansard* containing the debate on the Second Reading and a copy of the Bill and received in reply a three-page letter, which I studied on Friday. However, the amendments have made half of his points out of date. I cannot adequately do the job I was sent to do because I cannot have the information that I need. We have talked about a north-south divide, but the divide is between the different parts of government — between the Government on one side and local government on the other. This debate represents that division at its most acute.

The right hon. Member for Cambridgshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) was sacked from the Government for making a true and parliamentary statement — that a large Government majority is unhealthy for parliamentary democracy. We know that we cannot halt these proceedings because the Government will whip the vote. As a result, we shall not have adequate time to take advice on the amendments. The Government should realise that, urgent and important though this matter may be, the delay would be for 48 hours only. The motion would give us sufficient time to consult our local authorities and return to the debate on Wednesday.

The Government's programme is a travesty of parliamentary procedure. This is a new low in the way in which an arrogant Government are seeking to bulldoze their measures through Parliament, irrespective of the rights of constituents and affected bodies. We should be able to debate these matters in the time-honoured way, with time for full consultation. If we followed that way, we would have a much better Bill.

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I apologise to the Secretary of State for missing his speech, but I was talking to the treasurer of Hampshire county council, of which I am a member, to get some points from him. He was explaining that, as a result of the short time scale, he is finding it difficult to make comments to all hon. Members representing Hampshire, as is the normal procedure.

There is an irony in the debate. On page 2 are some important words about which the Minister must have thought carefully when he formulated the Bill. They are "proper practices be observed". Hon. Members have eloquently explained what they consider to be the proper practices when it comes to giving us the opportunity to discuss properly and fully the implications of the legislation before us. The Government's amendments were tabled just before the weekend, giving little time for them to be examined in depth and for the associations and local authorities that will be affected to make a proper response. There is little time for hon. Members on both sides of the Committee to be properly briefed on the implications not only of the Bill but of the amendments which, as has been said, will have a fundamental effect on what will happen. That is a dereliction of responsibility by the Secretary of State.

There must be some semblance of fair play in this place. If it cannot be seen to operate fairly, giving all hon. Members equal opportunity to have full and detailed knowledge of what the amendments mean and what their implications will be, that is a sad reflection on the state of democracy in our country. All hon. Members who have spoken from the Opposition Benches have put across that message loud and clear. I hope that, even now, the Secretary of State will tell us what he feels on this important point.

Question put:—

Division No. 95] **[5.35 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Buchan, Norman
Alton, David	Caborn, Richard
Anderson, Donald	Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Ashton, Joe	Campbell, Ian
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Canavan, Dennis
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Barron, Kevin	Cartwright, John
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Bell, Stuart	Clarke, Thomas
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Cleiland, David Gordon
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Bermingham, Gerald	Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Bidwell, Sydney	Coleman, Donald
Blair, Anthony	Conlan, Bernard
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*	Corbett, Robin
Bruce, Malcolm	Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*

Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'll)*
Deakins, Eric
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Don Dixon.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*

Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Michael Portillo.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Bill be considered in the following order: Clause 1, Schedule 1, Clauses 2 to 7, Schedule 2, Clauses 8 to 12, Schedules 3 and 4, Clauses 13 to 17, new Clauses, and new Schedules.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

The Committee divided: Ayes 233, Noes 175.

Division No. 57] **[5.38 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Don Dixon.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1

RATE FUND REVENUE ACCOUNTS

Dr. Cunningham: I beg to move amendment No. 2A, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

(1A) 'Subsection 1 of this section shall come into effect after the making of an Order by the Secretary of State, and no such Order shall come into effect until any hearings in progress at the date of introduction of this Act (whether expedited or otherwise) have been completed in the courts in respect of applications for judicial review brought against the Secretary of State regarding the Rate Support Grant settlement for 1986-87 or previous financial years.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2B, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection 1 of this section shall come into effect after the making of an Order by the Secretary of State, and no such Order shall come into effect until after the laying before Parliament by the Secretary of State of a report setting out the dates, and any other details which he may consider relevant, of the legal advice received by him prior to the introduction of this Act with respect to the legal interpretation of "relevant" and "total" expenditure for Rate Support Grant purposes.'.

No. 81, in clause 4, page 5, line 5, leave out subsection (6).

No. 83, in page 5, line 6, leave out 'whether'.

No. 84, in page 5, line 6, leave out 'or after'.

No. 85, in page 5, line 7, at end add

'save those decisions of a court in respect of litigation before the courts on 12th January.'.

No. 100, in clause 6, line 1, leave out subsection (4).

No. 102, in page 6, line 2, leave out 'whether'.

No. 103, in page 6, line 2, leave out 'or after'.

No. 104, in page 6, line 3, at end add

'save those decisions of a court in respect of litigation before the courts on 12th January 1987'.

Dr. Cunningham: This large group of amendments deals with the provisions in the Bill that seek to give the Secretary of State various legal immunities, that seek also to prevent legal challenges being pursued against the Secretary of State, as they have been in the past, and with matters associated with those general points.

The first group of amendments would delay the implementation of the Bill, pending the making of orders in the House of Commons. However, the Government's policies on local government finance and on the law governing it are now in such a complete shambles after almost eight years of legislative and administrative change, and are so confused and inexplicable—even from the Treasury Bench—that we should not rush ahead with the further powers contained in the Bill, as we are, but build some safeguards into the legislation so that

Parliament can have a subsequent opportunity to scrutinise, discuss and debate those matters before confirming any actions by the Secretary of State.

From the outset, my hon. Friends and I have emphasised that the Bill is not simply confined to sorting out the mess that I have briefly described. It gives substantial additional powers to the Secretary of State to intervene in local authority accounting, introduces rate limitation in 1987-88 by formula, and excludes the courts from reviewing the Secretary of State's decisions.

There is such confusion over the current position that it is wrong for the Government to use the Bill to impose even more arbitrary decisions. We cannot take those matters lightly. I re-emphasise that, however technical, difficult and complex the Bill is, no part of our scrutiny of it will include talking for the sake of talking, or filibustering. We recognise that there are many amendments before the House—we have tabled many of them — and if we are satisfied with the explanations given by the Secretary of State or Ministers, we shall pass on quickly to the other matters before the House. That is a general statement of our position, and that has always been my position when dealing with legislation. We are not interested in talking and delaying the Committee just for the sake of it. Nor are we interested in putting tomorrow's debate in jeopardy because Opposition Members have deliberately chosen a debate on the failure of the Government's economic policies. I should like to make that absolutely clear at the outset.

Amendment No. 2A raises an issue that is especially important to the boroughs of Greenwich and Islington. Greenwich had challenged various aspects of the 1986-87 rates support grant settlement in the courts and was part way through those proceedings when the Bill had its Second Reading. The borough of Islington had also mounted a legal challenge against the Secretary of State's actions, but was at an earlier stage in its proceedings.

Apparently, the Government feared, or believed, that those legal challenges would be successful and that they would cause not only serious embarrassment to the Government, but serious difficulties for the Government's policy of rate limitation in the current financial year, let alone difficulties in the future.

The effect of the Bill, validating retrospectively all previous decisions under the Rates Act 1984 and rate support grant decisions by the Secretary of State and attempting to exclude those decisions from judicial scrutiny, is to terminate the legal proceedings that have been initiated by the London boroughs that I have mentioned. That is unacceptable.

In effect, Parliament is being asked to validate previous unlawful acts without knowing in what ways the Secretary of State may have acted unlawfully. His statement on 16 December 1986 admitted to one way in which we know that he has been acting outside the law in the definition of total and relevant expenditure. Opposition Members have continually emphasised that if it was simply that a correction would make the de jure situation accord with the de facto situation, I do not suppose that today's proceedings would have lasted even this long. We could all have agreed and gone on to debate the other urgent matters before us. However, as we have emphasised, that is not the case.

The court cases to which I have referred sought to review other aspects of the Secretary of State's use of his discretion. The Bill excludes those matters from scrutiny, also. The Government should allow the implementation of that blanket exclusion from the courts to await the decisions of the cases that are currently in progress, if Parliament is not to be accused, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and other hon. Members have suggested, of taking a big leap in the dark, which is what the Secretary of State is asking us to do.

Similarly, amendment No. 2B would delay the implementation of the Bill until the Secretary of State had laid a report setting out the dates of, and other background information relating to, the legal advice that he has received on the lawfulness, or otherwise, of block grant arrangements.

On Second Reading, on 12 January, the Secretary of State conceded that he first became aware of the problem in September. However, in December last year he suggested that he had first become aware of the problem in October. We have asked him to be specific about that but, so far, he has failed to do so. I should like to ask him now, since he has had the time to check his file, which is what he said that he did not have the time to do during the debate on Second Reading, exactly when he was told of that situation. What was the date? We are even entitled to ask the time of day when he was first advised of the problem. However, the Committee is certainly entitled to know the date on which the Secretary of State was first advised of the matter. That is important for several reasons.

The Secretary of State has repeatedly said that the matter should be clarified urgently, and my hon. Friends and I agree with him on that. However, it cannot be so urgent because he delayed for almost four months, certainly for three months, before coming to the House to advise hon. Members of the problem. Having told us about the problem, he still did not advise us about his intended solutions.

Therefore, we are now perfectly entitled to ask for a specific, clear and unequivocal answer, because the Secretary of State can no longer hide behind the excuse that the Bill has been treated in that way because of its urgency. The Secretary of State has had more than sufficient time to deal with the matter far more effectively, efficiently and candidly than he has to date. Other questions follow from that. Should the legal doubts raised have been sufficient to affect the issue of the first rate support grant consultation document on 3 October? I said the first consultation document, but I think that I probably mean the second. The first had come much earlier and the third, as we know, came in December. Why was there no reference to the problem at the date of issue of that consultation document and in subsequent consultation documents? Why did the Secretary of State proceed with the rate support grant settlement if he knew that he was not going to be able to legislate without a series of major changes to the law? On what specific date did the Attorney-General give his advice to the Secretary of State? Was that before or after his announcement of 3 December?

It seems that the Government did not move with undue haste or show any alacrity in seeking to find a solution to the problem. On the contrary, they are open to the charge that they have been very dilatory, at least in the early stages. They are now using a delay of their own making to argue that the Bill is urgent. How can the Bill be described as urgent if it has taken so long to bring it before the House and when it is still apparently taking a great deal

[Dr. Cunningham]

of effort and energy to get the provisions right and to clarify the law? What the Secretary of State continues to present as a technical measure goes much further in terms of ministerial power. None of this would have been necessary and the normal, re-determined, processes in the Rates Act 1984 could have proceeded after, at most, a short delay if the Government had introduced a simple technical measure when they first became aware of the problem. We need a substantive answer to that question.

Amendments Nos. 82, 83, 84 and 85 relate to clause 4 of the Bill. They are pertinent to the exclusion of the courts from rate support grant cases. The amendments relate specifically to clause 4(6) which seeks to override any court decision and prevent it from having any effect where it is contrary to the Bill's intentions in respect of rate support grant settlements up to and including 1986-87. In previous exchanges the Secretary of State has indicated to me and the House that he thinks that we are misinterpreting those aspects of the Bill. He will have the opportunity to try to convince us of that this evening and perhaps in subsequent debates on these matters.

6 pm

Having discussed the issue since Second Reading, we are clearly and firmly advised from within local government that its interpretation of the proposals is as we suggested it was on Second Reading. However, the Bill does not provide for the circumstances in which a challenge is undertaken but the court's decision does not have a contrary effect to that intended by the Bill. Presumably, the decision will have effect in such cases. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) pointed out on Second Reading, it would still appear to be open to authorities to seek judicial review of decisions which are outside the exclusions in the Bill in order to shed light on legal interpretations in areas where demands are excluded.

Amendment No. 82 should remove the relevant words from the subsection and insert wording to restore the existing right of any council or ratepayer to seek judicial review of ministerial action. It appears to us that not only are councils' rights affected by the provisions of the Bill, but the rights of ratepayers as well. If that is so, it flies in the face of what Ministers have erroneously claimed again and again for their legislation, which is that it is aimed at being beneficial to individual ratepayers. That argument can certainly no longer be used with any credence in terms of the changes in rate support grant over the past seven years and we would argue that it cannot be used in respect of the provisions in the Bill because ratepayers would no longer have the right that they have had for a considerable time.

My understanding of amendments Nos. 83 and 84 is that they would have the more limited effect of removing the exclusion in respect of decisions taken after the passing of the Act. Perhaps we shall hear more about that from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft).

Amendment No. 85 is more specific, although it would have a different effect. Decisions on cases before the courts by the date of Second Reading, 12 January 1987, would stand whether contrary to the Bill or not. That would mean that the case initiated by the London borough of Greenwich in particular would have the opportunity of obtaining a meaningful decision in the courts. It seems wrong to us for legislation to be rushed through after a case has started with the purpose being, at least in part, to negate the possible outcome of a case before a decision has even been reached. We have put that to the Secretary of State before. We have suggested that all this has happened because of such legal challenges. He has said that that is not the case. However, the implications of the provisions of the Bill are exactly that. They would obviate a decision being reached in the courts. We believe that that is being done to prevent further embarrassment to the Secretary of State because he has abused his existing powers.

I can well understand the right hon. Gentleman not wanting an accumulation of such events. After all, there have been one or two spectacular cases in the courts dealing with his abuse of powers and his misjudgment as to what the law says. He and the Government have been considerably embarrassed as a result. I can understand him not wanting too many more of those on the record. However, I cannot think of many Ministers in many Governments who have sought to introduce legislation to block cases that were halfway through their proceedings in the courts. It is an ingenious proposition. I give the Secretary of State high marks for—what would be the expression? — his nerve or entrepreneurial skills in blocking the decision of the courts.

Mr. Tony Banks: Can my hon. Friend think of any decision by a Minister in recent years that would have been described, as one of the Secretary of State's decisions was described by the courts, as

"unlawful, irrational and procedurally improper"?

Can my hon. Friend think of any other occasion when a Minister has been so castigated by a judge in a court?

Dr. Cunningham: I can remember many occasions when Ministers in this Government have acted irrationally. They have not always been castigated by a judge for doing so. However, we have just seen a combination of irrationality and irascibility on the part of the right hon. Gentleman in trying to bounce Government amendments through the Committee in this way. That has led to a debate which need not have taken place if the Secretary of State had acted more soberly in the first place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was referring to the judges' comments about the Secretary of State's actions in respect of the Greater London council and London Regional Transport. The Secretary of State had sought to misappropriate, or take unlawfully, £50 million from the Greater London council. At any rate, I believe that that was the figure.

Mr. Tony Banks: Absolutely.

Dr. Cunningham: I thought that my memory was accurate on that point. The Secretary of State is now presenting provisions that, in effect, mean that he will not wait for a judge to determine against him; he will legislate to prevent the case reaching the point when a judgment would be forthcoming.

The provisions relating to excluding the courts have serious constitutional implications. It is acknowledged that statute law has precedence over the decisions of judges and that matters to clarify law, or innovation by statute, are almost always preferable as instruments of policy to the common law. It is equally important, however, that a mechanism should exist for interpreting legislation in cases of disputes. Historically, the courts have always been able to do that in such matters.

Clause 4(1) makes it clear that the scope of the Secretary of State's actions, which are to be respectively validated, are very wide. It states:

"Anything done by the Secretary of State".

The Secretary of State is giving himself an enormous and a wide-ranging administrative discretion in respect of rate support grant allocations and the formula from which the allocations are derived. We know why he wants to do that. Indeed, he has already done that, in effect, in the past three months in his series of three, unprecedented consultation documents. He has made proposals, withdrawn them, made new proposals and withdrawn them.

Mr. Ridley: I want to make a small point which may not be relevant to the Bill. We must get away from this mistaken view of three attempts, which the hon. Gentleman has spoken of, in typical and inaccurate fashion. It is normal practice to issue a global RSG proposal and later to issue a detailed breakdown containing the details affecting each different authority. The only change that was made was that I issued two of the latter detailed statements. However, all previous settlements have contained the global and detailed statements.

Dr. Cunningham: I accept the Secretary of State's explanation. He has said that he issued a statement and two consultation documents. However, that action was without precedent as far as we can tell. He has already used a very loose interpretation of the position to redistribute money from authorities, such as Birmingham, to satisfy his hon. Friends in the southern, Tory-controlled shire counties.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Why are they not here?

Dr. Cunningham: They are not here because they are satisfied that the Secretary of State is a pushover and they have got what they wanted. In this legislation, the Secretary of State is trying to prevent other authorities, which may be dissatisfied, from mounting a legal challenge against him. Many authorities are already dissatisfied and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) represents one such authority, the city of Birmingham.

6.15 pm

We cannot accept that there are any proper grounds for seeking such a blanket exclusion of judicial review unless the Department and the Secretary of State are concerned at other aspects of the validity of past settlements. The only possible argument that the Government can mount is that they wish to preserve certainty over past and current settlements after the upheaval of discovering the illegality of their past allocations. We do not believe that that argument stands even the most cursory examination. The effect of the Government's promises will be to override cases in preparation or before the courts, for example, with respect to Islington and Greenwich.

That will preclude any other possible challenges, even for the current year which has not yet finished. The provision does not preserve a just position against opportunist challenges. It enforces what we and many local government authorities view as an unjust position in the face of challenges, which, as I have emphasised, have not yet been determined. In other words, the Secretary of State is taking one view of the law from his position and an entirely different view of the due processes of law in respect of the position of those who disagree with him.

Amendment No. 100 relates to clause 6. Clauses 4 and 6 are similar. The Secretary of State should be asked to cite the precedent for a provision to negate a judgment of the court made after the Royal Assent to a Bill and the various other aspects of the provisions. My understanding is that a judgment either has or has not a contrary effect to the Secretary of State's suggestion. The subsection seems to operate on the basis that the Government are uncertain about how the courts will interpret the provisions of the clauses. The clauses therefore reflect a lack of confidence in the legal advice and legal position and, consequently, the detailed drafting of the Bill that the Secretary of State has presented. If that is true, it is no wonder that there are already a whole clutch of new amendments, and, as I said earlier, we confidently anticipate even more amendments from the Department of the Environment.

Through amendment No. 100 we are trying to delete subsection (4) from clause 6, which seeks to deny access to the courts in the same way as subsection (6) of clause 4. We are trying to delete it because if the Bill was carried in its present form it would prevent access to the courts by any local authority aggrieved at being designated by the Secretary of State as being rate-capped or aggrieved at the precise decisions made on rate limitation. That prohibition of litigation with respect to rate-limited authorities applies to financial years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88. The same general arguments apply with regard to subsection (4) as those that I have used in respect of other amendments relating to the powers of the courts and the legal rights of local authorities which may wish to seek redress in the courts.

Amendment No. 104 is linked in terms of its purposes to amendment No. 100. It is a less satisfactory option but it nevertheless allows access to the courts if litigation was begun by local authorities and was still before the courts on the date of Second Reading of the Bill—12 January. That is the position with regard to Greenwich and Islington.

I want to consider the Greenwich case in more detail before I finish and my view of the case is shared by the legal advisers of Greenwich council. The Bill sought to quash the 1986-87 rate limitation order as it related to Greenwich. That part of the challenge has succeeded. The Secretary of State consented to judgment in favour of Greenwich and a consent order was made by the High Court on 17 December. That is why we think that there has always been some connection between the activities and the decisions — and even the timing — of the Secretary of State and what was going on in the courts with respect to the Greenwich challenge to his actions.

The challenge also tried to prohibit the Secretary of State from redetermining multipliers which were determined for the London boroughs in the rate support grant report for England in 1986-87, as proposed by the Department of the Environment consultation paper LGF(G)8650. This part of the challenge is yet to be heard. It would have come before the courts later this month. The proposals have now been embodied in the 1986-87 first supplementary report, which the Secretary of State announced to the House on 13 January. He anticipated the outcome of those proceedings and seems to have accepted that he would have lost there too.

[Dr. Cunningham]

All this is very complicated, but it boils down to the fact that, faced with one substantial legal challenge to his present actions, the Secretary of State decided that he would empower himself to set aside court decisions because he believed that he would lose. He has consistently said that he is not seeking retrospective powers and that we have misinterpreted the arguments about this part of the Bill. We still do not accept that. The Secretary of State may tell us that it is other arguments that we have advanced which are the misinterpretations. With Greenwich and, we suspect, with Islington and, for all I know, others, the Secretary of State was in danger of having the courts overturn what he had done, and he is now legislating to prevent any local authority from having an opportunity to challenge what he is proposing.

I should like to emphasise what my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn and others have said about these being unprecedented powers. I look forward to hearing what the Secretary of State has to say. Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends want to ask questions about general issues and about the authorities that they represent.

Mr. Ridley: It may be for the convenience of the Committee if I speak fairly briefly now to state the case as I see it in regard to matters which the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has raised. That does not exclude me from replying to arguments that are made later in the debate.

The hon. Member for Copeland has not quite understood the legal provisions in relation to court cases and I shall try to put the record straight on what the Bill does. The hon. Gentleman is in a bit of a muddle today. Having agreed the procedure motion, he voted against it. It is not quite clear to me how he would like it changed. There seems to be a great deal of steam and emotion about the Bill, which is not based, as far as I can see, on the facts of what it would do. Perhaps, therefore, it would be helpful if I set out what it would do.

I should like to put one irrelevant point aside first. It is amendment No. 2B, which proposes that the Bill should not come into effect until an order has been made and I have published practically the whole history of my dealings with this matter and said when I had received legal advice. I should like to make it absolutely clear what happened.

I first heard that there was a problem towards the end of September — as I said to the House earlier. The problem was discussed, and we sought legal advice as it was not clear whether the problem was real. I eventually decided to refer the matter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. His advice was finally received in late October—as I have previously told the House. That was the first moment when the Government decided that it was necessary to tackle the problem. Before we received that advice, we were not clear whether we had to tackle the problem.

Dr. Cunningham: Bearing in mind the seriousness of the problem — it affected rate support grant for all local authorities — why did the right hon. Gentleman allow the Attorney-General to take such an apparently leisurely view of his second opinion? Why did it take so many weeks for the Attorney-General to confirm that there was a problem? If it was as urgent as the right hon. Gentleman says, why did he or his officials not telephone the Attorney-General every day saying that they must have an answer or rate support grant would be jeopardised?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is getting rather silly. He must ask my right hon. and learned Friend that question. I received proper legal advice from my right hon. and learned Friend and immediately set in train the complex planning and negotiations with my colleagues which were necessary to have the Bill brought to the stage at which it could be published just before Christmas, and about six weeks after we received legal advice. I should have thought that, in view of the complexity of the Bill, about which Opposition Members have been free with their criticism, it was a remarkable effort to get a Bill of this difficulty drafted in such a short time. I have no desire to apologise for that, let alone to accede to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that I should publish my daily timetables.

Mr. Meadowcroft : Does the Secretary of State agree that the procedures would have been speeded up if the Bill had been confined to rectifying the problem and if there had been no other clauses?

Mr. Ridley: That is where the Committee has not quite understood the Bill. That is what the Bill does. I concede immediately that the Bill goes further in regard to rate limitations. As I said on Second Reading and have said in statements, it was not possible to use Rates Act procedures to bring rate and precept limitations into effect for the coming financial year in time. I plead guilty, if guilt is involved, in that the Bill goes further than pure validation in regard to rate limitation.

As for the power of the courts, I hope to show the hon. Member for Copeland that nothing is done other than to validate the past in relation to matters of rate support grant.

Ms. Clare Short: The Secretary of State will know that his officials have written to Birmingham city council saying that they are calling into question the 1984-85 settlement. Surely that is retrospective and not just validating the past and therefore goes further than the explanation that he has just given.

6.30 pm

Mr. Ridley: We could have a debate on the Birmingham situation without trying to bring it into this amendment. When we decide upon the best amendment under which we can discuss the problems of Birmingham, I shall look forward to listening to the hon. Lady.

The Bill seeks to validate all past decisions and to protect them from legal challenge but not to validate any future decisions. It is perfectly possible——

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman need not get excited. I have to go through several statements before I reach the justification for that remark.

If anything Birmingham or I may do in the future is subject to a legal challenge, such a challenge can take place. It is not a question of going back, as argued by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). First of all, it is necessary to validate all past decisions relating to RSG. Secondly, there will be some interference with court cases relating to rate limitation and precept

limitation, for the very good reason that those limitations are decided in the Bill and that normal procedures are set aside. One could not have a situation where a court found on some rate limitation issues before Royal Assent to the Bill. Such a court decision could be immediately overruled by the Bill because statute law overrides any decision of the courts. That is why the situation is different.

I now wish to discuss amendment No. 2A, to which the hon. Member for Copeland has referred. The hon. Gentleman suggests that any cases to do with rate support grant that were before the courts before the introduction of the Bill should be allowed to run their full course. The hon. Gentleman should consider the practicalities. It is possible that in the one or two cases that fall into this category—that is about all there are—a case could be decided, go to appeal and finally to the House of Lords. Before such a case could be finally cleared up, one way or another, it could well take until the end of this year.

The hon. Member for Copeland is aware that it is necessary to get the Bill enacted as soon as possible, and certainly before the start of the new financial year. The whole operation of the Bill would be held up if a court case took as long as I have described. That is not a criticism of the judiciary—it must do its work properly—but if such delays occurred it is possible that that would lead to procrastination in the Bill coming into effect and local authorities would not know where they were and could not have grants paid to them.

Dr. Cunningham: I am very anxious to understand exactly what the Secretary of State is saying and its implications. The right hon. Gentleman has said that our interpretation is wrong—that the Bill, if passed, would retrospectively validate action he has taken and make such action immune from legal challenge. I would be happy if the right hon. Gentleman could clarify that, because it is very important. Is he saying that the provisions of the Bill mean that local authorities could challenge past decisions, but not on the grounds on which they may challenge them at the moment?

Mr. Ridley: It would be better if the hon. Gentleman would allow me to develop my argument. I am simply dealing with amendment No. 2A that requests that the Bill does not come into effect until all current cases which were before the courts before the Bill was introduced are cleared up. My argument is that that would lead to such a long delay that it would be intolerable.

Allow me to deal with the two cases raised by the hon. Member for Copeland. The first case, the Greenwich case, has two legs to it. First of all, it challenges what I intend to do in the first supplementary report for 1986-87. That is what the hon. Gentleman said. The Bill is not concerned —as suggested by some hon. Members—with validating future decisions taken in accordance with the provisions of the Bill and related legislation. Local authorities will be quite free to challenge those decisions. Any court decisions on those legal proceedings brought by Greenwich, but yet to be heard, will not be affected by the Bill. The Greenwich case concerns a decision that has not been taken and that is the first supplementary report for 1986-87. Once the Bill is enacted, it will be perfectly possible for that particular legal argument to be resumed. It will not be affected by the passage of the Bill.

The other leg of the Greenwich case is in a different category.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: If I may just finish this sentence, I shall gladly give way.

The other leg of the argument concerns the rate limit for 1986-87. I conceded that part of the case because of the total expenditure problem. I could not have defended my case in court because I discovered that the definition of total expenditure was not as we all thought it was. There was no point in fighting a case when the law was suspect. That was not the grounds on which Greenwich fought its case—it was totally incidental to it.

On the other hand, the case could not be fought without the law being clarified as to what was meant by total expenditure. Thus, the limit will be validated by clause 6 in this case, and the amendment will not affect it.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way because I want to understand exactly what he is saying. I hope he will bear with me if I repeat once again what he said. Is he telling the House, as I understood that he was, that the challenge made by Greenwich to prohibit him from redetermining multipliers, determined for London boroughs in the rate support grant report 1986-87—I understand that that challenge is due to be heard on 29 and 30 January—can still go ahead? If the court decides that, in redetermining the multipliers, the Secretary of State has acted unlawfully or whatever, he must abide by the decision of the court with regard to that part of Greenwich's challenge. Would that still be allowed even under this legislation?

Mr. Ridley: Subject to not knowing the dates of the court proceedings, the hon. Gentleman is correct. All the Bill does is validate the definition of total expenditure. The case that Greenwich is bringing cannot be fought and will not make any sense unless that is an accepted legal definition of total expenditure. Once there is such a definition, any extraneous matters can be considered by the court.

It is not possible to fight a case, assuming that the old definition of total expenditure was in existence, and win that case on the basis that the definition of total and relevant expenditure, on which we were all working, was invalid. The Bill substitutes a new definition of total expenditure so that there is no going back over the old argument.

Mr. Straw: The Opposition are genuinely trying to follow the Secretary of State's argument.

On the face of it, the powers that the Secretary of State is taking under clauses 4(6) and 6(4) are extraordinary. I can understand why the Secretary of State is seeking to validate past acts under clause 4(1). I do not understand why, having taken the power to validate past acts, which is consistent with what the rest of the Bill is seeking to do, the right hon. Gentleman still thinks it is necessary, having got the deemed validation of past acts, to say that, notwithstanding the decision of any court, whether before or after the passing of the Act, purporting to have a contrary effect, his decision will stand.

From reading the Bill, one concludes that any decisions made by the right hon. Gentleman under the powers of the Rates Act 1984, right up to the date when this Bill goes to Royal Assent — that includes future acts of his — are deemed validated by this Bill and are then made judge-proof. It is the judge-proof part to which we take exception.

Ms. Clare Short *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady would allow me to get to this point. I want to move to it but hon. Members keep asking in advance about the logical exposition of my speech. As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) says, clause 4(1) and clause 6(1), (2), (3) set out the definitions of total expenditure and rate capping, and clause 4(6) validates that for the past in relation to rate support grant and total expenditure, and clause 6(4) validates all past rate support grant decisions. As I understand the hon. Gentleman, he is saying that he accepts that in the context of being necessary to what the Bill is seeking to do.

I shall now turn to the phrase which has excited the Opposition so much, the phrase

"before or after the passing of this Act."

The situation is simple, and the solution is easy. Obviously, a decision taken by a court before the passing of this Act would be overridden by the validation. Therefore, there is no point in a court coming to such a decision. We might as well say in the legislation that that is what will happen. If a court considers a case which is concluded before the passing of this Act but does not give judgment until after the passing of this Act, then of course the court would give its decision after the passing of the Act. That is why the phrase is there. It catches the case, if one should occur, of a court concluding its business before the passing of the Bill but not giving its decision until after the passing of the Bill.

After the Bill is passed it has no effect at all upon judicial review or on any other action which might be brought against me. After the Act is passed, the definition of total expenditure and relevant expenditure contained in the Bill becomes the law. That definition takes over from the holding provisions about which the hon. Gentleman is complaining, that court decisions are invalid until the Bill is passed. I hope that that clears up this little bit of trouble.

Mr. Straw: It is important for us to be clear. It is true that in respect of decisions which the Secretary of State makes after the passing of the Bill, these two subsections have no specific effect. We are complaining about the fact that decisions that he may make up until the passing of the Bill will not be subject to judicial review because of these two subsections. That is wrong, and the Secretary of State has not so far explained why he thinks that is right.

Mr. Ridley: It depends on the subject of the litigation. If it has to do with total expenditure or involves the definition of total expenditure, the Act will prevail over any decision of the court. The hon. Gentleman must realise that any authority could go to court and claim that the definition of total and relevant expenditure is not the one that we have all been working on but was the one in the original 1980 Act. On that basis, authorities would win every case and in order to discourage them from doing that, it must be right — *[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentlemen do not understand, it would be wiser for them not to giggle. It must be right to say that none of those decisions can be upheld because they are validated by the Bill.

If a matter has nothing to do with the definition of total expenditure or with the rate support grant calculation based on it, it is judiciable but it might be better for the court to await the passage of the Bill so that it knows the definition of total expenditure. If the court prefers not to do that, it is perfectly possible for the case to proceed, but it will do so in the light of the fact that any decision which contravenes the definition of total expenditure in this Bill will later be proved invalid. However, if the matter is totally extraneous to total expenditure and is about something totally different like multipliers, which are not affected, it will be possible for the court to continue to determine the issue, just as it is possible for a court to decide that I was not wearing a seat belt when I should have been.

6.45 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: I follow the Secretary of State's argument on the definitions of total expenditure and the impact of the Bill. However, a point also arises from clause 6 about the designation of authorities for rate limitation and the setting of limits under the rate limitation proposals. The Secretary of State is commending to us a Bill which clearly says that any designation and any determination and notification of total expenditure under the Act for the financial year beginning in 1987—which is not yet upon us—cannot be challenged in the courts. Those are decisions which the Secretary of State has said he is likely to take, but he has not yet taken them and presumably he will not make them in final form until after the Royal Assent has been given to the Bill. Surely that is prospective and not retrospective legislation.

Mr. Ridley: That is the counterpart of what I said earlier, that it is necessary to put the rate and precept limitation proposals on the face of the Bill. I think they are in schedule 2 and the hon. Gentleman will have seen the complicated formula. As I have said, that is necessary because it will not be possible to complete the procedures after Royal Assent to the Bill and before authorities need to know what the rate limit is to be. I admit that this is a departure from straight validation, but it was the only course open to the Government and we have adopted the procedure of specifying the rate limits. They can be debated and amended in the House if hon. Members do not think that we have got it right.

The statute law which the Bill will become when it receives Royal Assent overrides any decision of the judiciary. If we did not include this provision and if there was a rate limit court case this month which the Government lost, it would still be overridden by the Bill when it received Royal Assent because the Bill specifies the rate limits. In a sense clause 6(4) is helpful to the court because it is perfectly obvious in common logic that it must be right to include that clause. I hope that that helps hon. Members to understand why these powers are here.

I concede that the powers about rate limitation are slightly different from pure validation, but I hope that the Opposition will concede that the parts of the Bill relating to rate support grant and total expenditure are no more than pure validation of the past and a necessary legal protection to stop the lacuna in the law being exploited in cases brought before the Bill becomes law. None of the Opposition amendments is necessary—indeed, some of them weaken the provisions that I have described—and I invite the Committee to reject them.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State, and I shall try to return in detail to some of the points about validation and retrospection

because they are the nub of this group of amendments. I should like to concentrate on amendments Nos. 83, 84, 102 and 103 because they are about retrospection. It is rather odd that the Secretary of State keeps on talking about the need for parliamentary haste. For so long there has been Government delay. It is quite apparent from the explanations that the Secretary of State has endeavoured to give us that the matter is so complex that there is no way in which, if we are to get this right this time, the matter should be pushed on without adequate clarification.

I appreciate the Government's dilemma in this matter. I appreciate that they are endeavouring to safeguard their position in the law, both before and after the passage of the Bill. The problem in trying to accept that dilemma and in endeavouring to assist the Government in coping with it is whether the terms of the Bill are drawn so widely that even in those matters in which they are endeavouring only to validate their past actions they take the provisions well beyond what would simply be validation. If the Bill is drawn too widely simply to be validation in these clauses, a misreading would simply mean that future legal safeguards would not be required. In other words, if the Secretary of State says that we who believe that the words "future clearance" and "future immunity" are required and are misreading the clause, then I suspect that we need to be persuaded further that a possible legal challenge to the Government's position could not be taken afterwards, rather than simply by the court's decision being announced afterwards.

I cannot conceive of a court commencing an action, when the Bill goes on to the statute book, before its decision is announced, not being able to take account of the fact that the law was changed before the decision is announced. Presumably the law will become different at that point.

Mr. Ridley: At the time a court hears the evidence and considers the issue, the law will be as it is now. The law comes to its own conclusion on the basis of the current law, and if between then and Royal Assent there is a change in the law, the whole matter is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman might well say that this is unlikely to happen, but good draftmanship and carefully prepared Bills guard against that unlikely event. That is why it has taken a little time to put the Bill together.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The temptation to accept the Secretary of State's interpretation and the desire to rely on good draftmanship is hardly borne out by the past. It is because we have not had good draftmanship that we are here today, wasting parliamentary time which could be better spent on a host of issues that will affect the future and deal with many of the crises that we face in far better ways than simply trying to get past legislation right for the sake of the Government's own face saving.

The issue of how widely drawn the Bill should be to avoid legal challenge is complicated. Even if the law had the effect that is intended, presumably the law would still be open to legal challenge. The problem is whether the Bill as drafted now will permit the continuation of legal challenges that were possible in the past as opposed to cutting out those as well. That is a matter of opinion. I accept that the Secretary of State has tried to convince us that they will still be allowed, but looking at the Bill as drafted I am unconvinced that it would not catch actions which would have been legitimate if they had been able to be brought under the law as it was thought to be, as opposed to what it turned out to be. Therefore, there is a real difficulty in accepting that interpretation.

I accept also that the Secretary of State is trying to do a belt-and-braces job. The Committee would abdicate its responsibility to protect not only the rights of individuals but the rights of councils if it allowed a too open-ended future power. It is tempting to accept the Secretary of State's interpretation, but he is saying that, in the context of legislation in this complex field of rate support grant, definitions of central financing of local government and so on, we want an enabling power for the future to catch challenges that we believe would not have been possible had the law been as we thought it was. I heard the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) say that it would be a useful precedent if ever there were a Government of a Left-wing colour.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Secretary of State for the Environment made the same case as Derek Hatton and the Clay Cross councillors made for retrospective legislation to indemnify them for actions which were illegal at the time they took them and which were resisted by the Labour party because of the nature of that legislation, for which the Government are now setting a precedent?

Mr. Meadowcroft: I agree only partly with the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The difference in the case that he puts is that there is no sense in which the challenge that was made by, for instance, the Clay Cross councillors was even thought to be legal at the time. The Clay Cross councillors were well aware of what they were doing and relied on possible future indemnity, even in relation to the fact that their action was illegal. That is very different from the fact that the Secretary of State believes that what he did was legal, and turned out not to be.

Mr. Roberts: Many councillors who were surcharged under the Government's legislation for not setting a rate on time believed that they were not breaking the law at the time they set that rate.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I accept that. Later in the debate we shall refer to some aspects of accounting procedures that are much more akin to what the hon. Gentleman said. Efforts to stop local authorities doing what they rightly believed to be legal, whether it was prudent or otherwise, is a different matter, but it was legal. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's charge would be more appropriate at that point. The analogy is much nearer to the kind of enabling Act that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) proposed, as was proposed by other Labour politicians in times past, to give powers in future for indemnity from the law. Indeed, it is a useful but dangerous precedent.

The danger is that if there is no consensus, not on the political values but on the procedures for democracy, we shall open up the same powers to be used or abused by parties of different colours. That danger is inherent in this process. The amendments have been tabled in the names of my hon. Friends and myself because, if the Bill's intention is a narrow definition of the ground of challenge —I do not believe that there is a need for blanket future protection—and if the Bill allows a wider interpretation, clauses 4(6) and 6(4) must not remain unamended. That is the nub of the argument. It demonstrates how

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

vulnerable the Government believe they are that they have to take such powers to themselves for future as well as past validation. It shows also how polarised central-local government relationships now are. The Government are trying to pre-empt future legal challenge which they believe will come about simply because they have so offended and embittered that relationship.

Mr. Ridley: I thought I had explained to the hon. Gentleman that the only circumstances in which a decision in the future will be upset by the Bill when it becomes an Act is when judgment is delivered after Royal Assent. If a case is heard after Royal Assent, it will be able to subject to judicial review any decision that I have made, together with any action or disputed point in law. The law will be changed by the Bill. In no sense does the Bill prejudice the courts in taking any future action of any sort in this field or in any other.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I hope that the Secretary of State is right about that point. The difficulty that Opposition Members face is that the Secretary of State has said to us time and again that this measure covers certain things and now we find that it does not. If that is what the right hon. Gentleman means, he has not expressed it or drafted it well. It does not clearly say that. Those who are examining the legislation, with the limited time available, and trying to get some advice as to what it means, believe that it covers something which is not simply retrospective in this sense.

If the Secretary of State is endeavouring only to put that point and he is giving an undertaking to the House that things which would not have been caught before but were open to legal challenge will still be available to challenge by the council, then I accept his genuine wish for that to be the case. The measure is not well drafted. The amendments should carefully be considered. It is right that these matters should be discussed. At least the Secretary of State has given us a clear undertaking about his intentions. Nevertheless, far too many powers are being given away. That is why these amendments have been tabled.

7 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech, and I wish to address my remarks to the authority that I represent, Islington, that is contesting this matter in the courts. However, before doing so I wish to make a few general points.

I begin by picking up from where the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has just left off. Even if we accept the Secretary of State's intention to validate the decisions of previous Secretaries of State relating to total expenditure, two questions immediately arise. First, is the Secretary of State's interpretation of the limited nature of the restrictions on the future action of the courts right? I fear that this Secretary of State does not have a very good track record. Therefore, we are entitled to ask whether the Secretary of State's interpretation of what the Bill says about the future actions of the courts is right. Secondly, even if the Secretary of State is right and all that the Bill does is validate actions that have been taken illegally by previous Secretaries of State, the Committee should not regard that matter lightly. Retrospectively it puts Secretaries of State above the law.

Furthermore, when I referred to clause 6 and the effect of rate limitation and rate capping under the Rates Act 1984, the Secretary of State admitted that the Bill gives him carte blanche to make decisions on rate limitation and designation under the Rates Act for the financial year 1987-88. The complicated formulae set out in schedule 2 to the Bill — which would be laughable if their implications were not so serious for the services that are provided for the millions of people in this country — relate to classes of authorities, not to individual local authorities.

As a Member of Parliament who represents an area that has been designated for rate capping by this Government —a point to which I shall return, because I believe that it has been wrongly designated—there is no way under the Bill for me to question in detail the reasoning, thinking, logic and preparation that led the Secretary of State to declare that he would rate-cap my authority. I am unable to raise questions on that issue under the Bill. I can raise questions on a collectivity of authorities, because that is what the Bill deals with, but I cannot do so in relation to one authority alone.

The Bill gives the Secretary of State a decision-making power that cannot be challenged in the courts to designate my local authority for the financial year 1987-88. That is not just a retrospective setting of the Secretary of State above the law; it is a prospective setting of the Secretary of State above the law, because it relates to next year's financial expenditure by my local authority on services that deeply affect thousands of my constituents. The Secretary of State says that he will designate and determine the rate-capping limit for my local authority, and it will be impossible for the designation or for the rate-capping limit to be challenged by the authority in the courts.

If in the dense morass of words to which the Secretary of State treated us earlier today he meant to say that he did not mean that at all but that the London borough of Islington would be able to challenge his intended rate-capping limit in the courts, I should be partially satisfied. I say "partially" because there are other matters with which I wish to deal later. If the Secretary of State intends to speak again before we reach a decision on the amendment, I should be grateful if he would tell us what the position will be of an individual local authority that is rate capped under clause 6 and schedule 2 if it seeks to challenge his determination of its rate-capped limit.

The Secretary of State rightly said that statute law overrides any court decision. The traditional, constitutional principle is that Parliament makes the laws and that the courts interpret them. It is accepted that the interpretation process is secondary to the making of statute law. However, we are dealing not so much with the passing of statute law as with the administrative decisions of Secretaries of State that are enabled by statute law. Increasingly, this Government has passed enabling legislation that lays down general powers for a Secretary of State which allow him to go ahead and make administrative decisions with, at most, a debate on an order at 11 o'clock at night. By that process, statute law is modified and court decisions become ever more important to the interpretation of the law.

The Secretary of State claims that we are dealing with the priority of statute law over the interpretation of statute law in the courts, but he is not telling the whole story. In

many cases we are dealing with the administrative interpretation of statute law as opposed to the legal interpretation of statute law.

Amendments Nos. 2A and 100 relate specifically to court actions that are now in progress relating to rate limitation designation under the Rates Act 1984. One of those actions has been brought by the London borough of Islington. On 17 July 1986 the Secretary of State designated 20 local authorities, including the London borough of Islington, under section 2(1) of the Rates Act. As he was required to do by legislation, the Secretary of State stated at that time the principles upon which those councils had been chosen for rate capping. Islington was designated because, amongst other things, it appeared to the Secretary of State, from

"best information available to him"

at 17 July 1986, that Islington's total expenditure for 1986-87 was likely to exceed its grant-related expenditure figure for that year by at least 12·5 per cent.

The Secretary of State, and previous Secretaries of State, have played around with the percentage increase over grant-related expenditure figures. In previous years, the figure had been 20 per cent., which was the figure that the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), gave in the middle of the night in Committee on the Rates Bill.

That figure of 20 per cent. was modified by this Secretary of State in his announcement of July 1986 to 12·5 per cent. That was the benchmark. Local authorities that were 12·5 per cent. over the grant-related expenditure were profligate, overspending and acting to the detriment of their ratepayers, according to the Secretary of State.

The London borough of Islington was caught by that provision on the basis of the information available to the Secretary of State at that time. It would appear, from the way that he made that decision, that the figure of 12·5 per cent. was specifically chosen to catch the London borough of Islington, because its expenditure above grant-related expenditure figure was 12·52 per cent.—a difference of 0·02 per cent. or £15,000. In terms of the millions of pounds that form the London borough of Islington's budget, that was a marginal figure. One has to ask whether the figure of 12·5 per cent. was selected specifically to ensure that Islington was included. I suspect that the answer to that question is yes.

On the basis of the figures that the Secretary of State had at that time, Islington was marginally above the rate-cap limit that he had set of 12·5 per cent. The next most marginal of the other rate-capped authorities on the list was Brighton, which was 13·31 per cent. over grant-related expenditure.

Soon after being designated, and soon after the announcement of July 1986, Islington informed the Secretary of State that, owing to an over-estimate of at least £100,000 of the precepts and levies elements of the rates on its own properties, its expenditure for 1986-87 would be reduced to only 12·42 per cent. above the grant-related expenditure. That was not changed by any definition of proposed expenditure or actual expenditure; it was a purely technical matter in so far as it related to the precepts and levies elements of the rates on council properties.

The information that the Secretary of State had available when he made that decision was inadequate and incorrect. The expenditure that he should have been looking at for the London borough of Islington was not 12·52 per cent. over the grant-related expenditure, but 12·42 per cent. over the grant-related expenditure. Therefore, the expenditure was below the 12·5 per cent. figure that the Secretary of State had decided upon as the principle for designation.

7.15 pm

As a result of the discovery of that mistake on the part of the Secretary of State, Islington asked the Secretary of State to withdraw the designation but he refused to do so. Even though he had set the principle at 12·5 per cent., and Islington clearly and specifically demonstrated to him subsequently that it fell below that threshold criterion, the Secretary of State decided that Islington should remain rate-capped.

On that specific point, Islington then asked for judicial review of the Secretary of State's decision. It took that decision on counsel's advice, believing that it had an extremely good case to seek an order of certiorari, quashing the decision to designate, and an order of mandamus requiring him to consider, in accordance with the law, Islington's request that he withdraw or not proceed with the designation. The hearing is due to start on 21 January 1987.

However, subsequent to that, the Secretary of State has discovered that, for completely different reasons, many of the decisions on which he and many previous Secretaries of State have been basing their decisions in relation to rate support grants—definitions of total expenditure and rate limitations—have been ultra vires in the past.

The Secretary of State has brought the Bill before the House seeking to validate both previous decisions and intended future decisions. In so doing, he has effectively conceded that the judicial review which the London borough of Islington has sought against his original decision is now not needed, because his designation of last July was rendered illegal and nugatory. What he has therefore done, through the Treasury solicitor—there is considerable correspondence between the Treasury solicitor acting for the Secretary of State and the borough solicitor of the London borough of Islington acting for the borough—is to concede that the Secretary of State's July decision was wrong, and therefore there is no contest to be made in the court.

By so conceding, the Secretary of State has conceded the more general principles that form part of the content of the Bill. He has not conceded the specific point about the expenditure over grant-related expenditure which formed the nub of the London borough of Islington's case in relation to its designation under the rate-capping.

The Local Government Finance Bill seeks, in effect, to prevent the courts from quashing designations that have been challenged on any grounds, whether or not they are to do with an error in relation to rate support grant or total expenditure. What is effectively happening in this legislation is that the Secretary of State is saying that he will take powers under this Bill to render all existing court actions invalid, whether or not they are specifically related to the point of the Bill.

The challenge that has been mounted by the London borough of Islington does not have to do principally with the point of the Bill. It relates to the amount that the Secretary of State is calculating with regard to the London borough of Islington's expenditure over and above the grant-related expenditure assessment.

[Mr. Chris Smith]

I should like the Secretary of State not only to answer the first question that I put to him about the general position of rate-capped authorities in seeking to challenge the 1987-88 rate determination, but also to answer the specific question whether he accepts, having had the figures from the London borough of Islington, that the figure of 12·42 per cent. above GRE is the figure that relates to Islington's expenditure rather than the figure of 12·52 per cent., which he had in front of him when he made his original decision to determine a figure for Islington in July 1986.

If the right hon. Gentleman accepts that, and if his intention is still to catch only those authorities on 12·5 per cent. and above, will he now agree to seek a means of excluding the London borough of Islington from rate determination and a rate-cap limit, because it clearly does not fall above the threshold that he had originally intended and set in July last year?

If the right hon. Gentleman does not give that assurance, will he accept that, by bringing the Bill before the House, he is effectively including a borough for rate-capping which, under his original intention of last July, he would have had to exclude because it would not have fallen on the wrong side of his own threshold?

If the right hon. Gentleman accepts that point, is not the effect of the Bill to ensure that he brings the London borough of Islington into rate-capping whereas otherwise it would have fallen outside rate-capping? The Secretary of State will know that the borough had an extremely good chance of ensuring that his original inclusion of the borough was quashed by the court because he was acting on incorrect information.

If that is the case, the Secretary of State's plea at the Dispatch Box that all he is doing is validating previous decisions and, of course, that he has no intention of setting himself above the law sounds, I am afraid, rather hollow. By bringing the Bill before the House, he will, if it is passed, have included my borough for rate-capping when previously, by action of the court, the borough would have been able to avoid the rate-cap limit. If that is the case, I am afraid that services to thousands of my constituents will be put at risk.

I should be grateful for answers to those specific questions when the Secretary of State replies. I fear that my borough and my constituents will be badly hit by the Bill. They at least had a chance of representation through the courts and an escape from rate-capping before the Bill was laid before us.

Ms. Clare Short: I, like most Labour Members, listened with great care to the Secretary of State's explanation of the extraordinary powers that we are debating. I referred previously, in an intervention, to Birmingham. The Secretary of State said that he was happy to debate the situation there. Amendment No. 87, which we shall come to later, relates specifically to Birmingham, but I want to examine what the Secretary of State said about the powers that are taken under the Bill in relation to Birmingham. I cannot understand how what the right hon. Gentleman is threatening to do to Birmingham can be legalised by the Bill or how the explanation that he gave us today can be correct.

The Secretary of State made it clear repeatedly that the Bill does nothing more than validate the past and put right for the future the position that the House and local government thought obtained in the past. The treasurer of Birmingham denies that, and suggests that the definitions given by the Secretary of State in the Bill are contrary to what everyone in local government has believed and practised.

In Birmingham, the Secretary of State intends retrospectively to invalidate some fund contributions legally made by Birmingham as far back as 1983-84—decisions that were certified by the Audit Commission. Birmingham's auditors, Price Waterhouse, wrote to the Department in May 1986 in relation to the 1984-85 accounts and said:

"We have considered this issue in some detail and have concluded that the contribution is a lawful charge."

On 16 December 1986 a Mr. A. C. B. Ramsay from the Secretary of State's Department wrote to Birmingham's chief executive saying that it was likely, because of the new Bill, that actions taken in the past would be called into question. It does not say that it is certain, but that the new Bill may have implications for Birmingham as from its outturn return for 1984-85. The letter says:

"The outturn information for 1984-85 submitted on your authority's RSIB Form covered by an auditor's certificate dated 2 October 1985 and reissued on 16 May 1986, shows unallocated net contributions from the rate fund revenue account to special funds of £15,417,652 and a closing deficit on that account of £7,450,980."

The letter goes on to say:

"It may be that these contributions or some part of them fall within the category of contributions which the Secretary of State proposes to specify"—

that is an action in the future—

"should not be included in 'relevant' and therefore 'total expenditure'."

The net effect on Birmingham of that possible proposition—it seems that it is not decided, yet we have been told that the legislation is all about putting right what everybody knew was the case in the past—is to cost the people of Birmingham £8 million. We have done rather badly out of the Secretary of State because we recently also lost some £30 million because of other decisions that he has made. That amount is a considerable sum. For the average family it is about £12 a year.

I am asking the Secretary of State specifically, please, to explain how he can suggest that the clauses and the powers simply validate the past. How can they possibly give him power to make a decision in the case of Birmingham that has not yet been made about how much of a notional sum that was spent in 1983-84 might be taken away from the citizens of Birmingham? Can he give us any possible explanation that ties in with the explanation that he gave previously suggesting that no future decision of the Secretary of State would be covered by the vast powers that he is taking to make decisions that cannot be challenged in the courts?

Mr. Tony Banks: I want to talk specifically about amendment No. 2A and make sure as far as I can—I am afraid that I cannot be at all certain—that at the end I shall understand exactly what the Bill means.

The amendment has particular relevance to Islington, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has just spoken, and Greenwich. If our good and late colleague, Guy Barnett, were here, I am sure that he would want to raise in great detail the Bill's impact on his borough of Greenwich, which he served so well. He would certainly do it a lot

better than ever I could. I am sure that for one brief moment tonight the Committee will be united in saying that we wish that Guy Barnett were here, participating, as he normally would have done, in a Bill of this sort.

I want to deal with the question of the Greenwich challenge because it seems to be the borough that is most caught by the Bill, although I shall show later how badly Newham will be affected by the Bill. Cases that are already in the courts, Greenwich and Islington, are directly affected.

As I understand it, the Greenwich challenge sought to quash the 1986-87 rating order on it. In this part of the challenge, the Secretary of State has now consented to judgment in favour of Greenwich, and the order was made by the High Court on 17 December. That is affected by the Bill, because clause 6 will re-ratecap Greenwich for 1986-87 and reverse the High Court decision. Perhaps the Secretary of State can confirm this. He is shaking his head. Does he mean that that is not the situation? I am not making cheap debating points. I am merely asking him for information. Even if we disagree, we should at least understand what is going on, so that we can make progress. I understood that the Secretary of State had consented to judgment in favour of Greenwich in the High Court on 17 December, but is now seeking to reverse that High Court decision by the Bill. The Secretary of State is not saying anything, so I shall push on.

7.30 pm

I am assuming that the Secretary of State knows what is going on. If he does not, we are in an even worse mess than the most pessimistic of us thought that we were in to start with. That is how byzantine and obscurantist the legislation is becoming. Before I completely lose patience with the Bill, I point out that it demonstrates like no other just how unwise and ludicrous it is for the Committee to try to get itself involved in the detailed minutiae of local government finance. This is absurd. Ten years ago, I was the chairman of a finance committee, and I understood local government finance. We did not get ourselves into the mess which local government now unfortunately gets itself because the Government keep changing the rules and moving the goalposts. However, there is no way that I can pretend that I understand, in the detail that I feel that I should if I am asked to make a decision, the Bill or the position of local government finance.

When I asked the Secretary of State about the second leg of the Greenwich approach in the courts — the redetermining of the multipliers—he said that that part of the Greenwich challenge could still go ahead in the courts. I assume that when he said that he was not saying that it could go ahead in the courts if it has enough money to pay for the lawyers. I assume that there will be some valid reason for proceeding with the court case of Greenwich's challenge to the redetermination of multipliers.

Mr. Ridley: I can help the hon. Gentleman on this. If and when I make a first supplementary report for 1986-87 —which I cannot do before the passing of the Bill—I shall be making a new decision in that supplementary report, which will be challengeable in the courts. If Greenwich wishes to challenge that, it can, but it is not possible to do that on the basis of the definition in the Bill until the Bill has reached the statute book.

Mr. Banks: As I understand it from my information, Greenwich is pursuing redetermination of the multipliers in the courts at a hearing on 29 and 30 January. It would be helpful to everyone if the Secretary of State would further advise the Committee as to whether it is even remotely possible that, if the courts were to find in favour of Greenwich, he would be prepared to accept that judgment. I am sure that he does not want the resources of the ratepayers of Greenwich to be wasted by what would, in effect, become an idle and useless challenge in the courts because, under this legislation, the Secretary of State will be able to set aside any decision made by the High Court on the redetermination of multipliers.

Mr. Chris Smith: I have been following my hon. Friend's argument carefully. I am particularly concerned about multipliers. In the complex formula included in schedule 2, in relation to a category of boroughs that includes Greenwich, there is a specific point about the multiplier on page 13. It says that "M", which is part of the crucial formula,

"is the figure shown as the multiplier in relation to the authority in the relevant Report."

We have no knowledge for certain of what the relevant report will say about the multiplier for Greenwich. However, clause 6 says:

"any designation of an authority . . . and . . . any determination . . . for an authority's total expenditure . . . shall . . . be deemed to have been in compliance"

and that shall not be challengeable.

How can it be that the Secretary of State can determine a multiplier for Greenwich through the formula in schedule 2 and apply it in the relevant report to which it refers to determine a ratecap limit, and then not be challengeable? That question must be asked.

Mr. Banks: That question must be asked, but not of me. The Secretary of State must answer it. I do not understand how this will operate. If Greenwich is successful in its challenge in the courts over the redetermination of multipliers, that will affect the 1986-87 rate support grant settlement. As I understand it, that will then be caught up within the Act, as it will become, so any decision made by the courts in respect of the multipliers for Greenwich will not be to the benefit of Greenwich because it will be set aside by this legislation.

However, earlier, the Secretary of State clearly implied that Greenwich could go to the courts and proceed with its challenge to the multipliers. I would be prepared to give way if the Secretary of State could throw a little more light on this part of the Bill.

The redetermination of multipliers is a highly complicated subject. Greenwich came to the challenge in the courts for the following reason. In simple terms, the previous Secretary of State received a complaint from Bromley that it did not get an adequate allowance in rate support grant terms for taking over additional highways on the abolition of the GLC. I am advised that the Secretary of State agreed, and proposed to give Bromley more grant. He decided to find this money by penalising other local authorities, and inner London boroughs in particular. Greenwich is the largest potential loser with an envisaged loss of £3·822 million grant in the 1986-87 entitlement.

Greenwich objected that the Secretary of State had no powers to do this, and this he now acknowledges. However, although we know that the Secretary of State is the only person who is absolutely certain what the law is,

[Mr. Banks]

Greenwich still maintains that he has no powers to redetermine multipliers and penalise Greenwich as proposed.

The stated intention of the 1986-87 RSG report was to avoid losses or gains to ratepayers as a result of the GLC abolition. There was much talk about that during the passage of the Local Government Act 1985. The Government sought to ensure that there were no losses or gains to ratepayers as a result of abolition by determining multipliers to adjust the rate support grant entitlement of successor authorities.

As a preliminary, it was necessary to make an expenditure assumption to reflect the transfer of functions from the GLC to successor authorities. In other words, the Secretary of State had to divide the GLC budget roughly between all the successor bodies. This division of the GLC budget was notified to Greenwich and other successor bodies by a Department of the Environment letter of 20 December 1985 which purported to give the final allocations—I emphasise "final"—of the GLC budget. Multipliers were determined in the RSG report using that allocation.

The allocation for Greenwich was £22·779 million. But Greenwich has to spend £24 million on ex-GLC services and estimates that expenditure of not less than £26 million is required. It does not have the resources to spend at that level. The Secretary of State now proposes to change his final allocation for Greenwich and to reduce it to about £20·513 million. Greenwich is complaining that it is extraordinarily difficult to get accurate information from the Secretary of State and the Department. The original allocation, which Greenwich maintains is inadequate, will be further reduced.

As the original allocation was inadequate, there were losses for Greenwich ratepayers as a result of GLC abolition, contrary to the stated intention of various Secretaries of State. It is those losses that the Secretary of State now proposes to increase. The effect of his proposals is to withdraw £3·822 million of Greenwich's 1986-87 block grant entitlement, leaving a net figure of £49·286 million. Greenwich ratepayers will have to find a further £3·822 million. This is in addition to the losses which they have already suffered as a result of GLC abolition.

Grant is, in effect, being taken away from Greenwich and other inner London boroughs and given to Bromley, Barnet, Sutton and other outer London boroughs. We understand that process and we appreciate the politics involved. Those boroughs are either Tory boroughs or boroughs in which the Conservative Government believe that they stand a chance of gaining control. Richmond is one of the obvious examples. The Government believe that they can fiddle the rate support grant settlement in such a way as to benefit themselves politically. That is fair enough. Let us all be open about it. That is part of the pork barrel. The pork barrel is attractive, if one's snout is in it, but is not much fun if one sees someone else snuffling up all one's resources. That is why Greenwich and Newham are complaining. But the wheel will turn and our snouts will be in the pork barrel before long.

Greenwich is complaining bitterly about its treatment and will challenge the redetermination of the multipliers by the Secretary of State in court on 29 January. If the courts decide that the Secretary of State has acted unreasonably or unlawfully in the redetermination of multipliers for the 1986-87 rate support grant settlement, will Greenwich be able to benefit from that judgment? If so, Greenwich can proceed happily with this case because, as in the first part of its case, the borough feels that it is on strong ground.

Mr. Michie: Once again, we are trying to defend the local government system which has suffered seriously for many years. Fear about the Secretary of State's powers worries us all, whatever our political persuasion. As our amendments show, we are trying to take away the tremendous powers of the Secretary of State. He will be not only above local authorities, but above the law. That is against what I believe to be natural justice.

Places such as Sheffield could be wronged. I believe that they will be. It may be put in a position in which it cannot carry out its statutory obligations. That will certainly be the case with the south Yorkshire fire service.

7.45 pm

If those circumstances arise and the Secretary of State is given so much power, they will act against the natural justice of people who are trying not only to defend services but to carry out the duties vested in them by central Government.

The Secretary of State wishes to ignore the statistics that have been given by local government on its needs and obligations. He wishes to ignore the massive unemployment in Sheffield, the fact that it has the highest number of old-age pensioners, and the fact that it cannot carry out its statutory duties. Are we to understand that, whatever judgment is made by the Secretary of State, there will not be the right of appeal to the courts? That is what I understand to be the position.

The Sheffield city council told the Secretary of State that his expenditure limit implies "unachieveable economies". It predicted "disastrous cuts" in services. It asked him to raise its spending capacity from £258,915,000 to £295,832,000. In its case for appeal the council made many points, most of which have been ignored.

What should the council do in those circumstances? Does it just say, "OK. We shall just sit down and let things happen." No, of course not. Local authorities are just as responsible for carrying out their duties as any other organisation, especially this House of Commons.

Sheffield's GRE for 1986-87 is £33·2 per head below the metropolitan district per capita average leading to a GRE reduced by £17·9 million and a loss of grant of £31·4 million on budgeted spending in 1986-87. Was that taken into account? No, it was not.

Does not the Secretary of State believe that we can appeal against such judgments, which are made on an irrational basis? Does it mean that, despite the fact that the European Parliament, in a recent study, found that of the 102 largest urban areas in Europe the Sheffield-Rotherham conurbation ranked as one of the lowest in terms of social and economic health, it is not recognised by the Secretary of State? Does that mean that local authorities should not have the right to appeal somewhere, to try to put their case before a court in another area, to determine that they can carry out their duties? Is that what the Bill is all about? Is that what the Secretary of State wants? If a local authority has the highest youth unemployment, does that mean that it does not have the right to appeal and argue a case? Such powers are dangerous not only for the Secretary of State, because

sooner or later he will drop another clanger and when he gets a problem will have to change his policy yet again, but for democracy generally.

Therefore, I hope that the Secretary of State will not take the powers proposed in the Bill because he does not need them unless, as someone once suggested to me, the Conservative Government cannot abide the freedom of local authorities because it frustrates their ultimate policy. That is to pay the rich and to take from the poor. Unfortunately for the Government, many local authorities are prepared to take from the rich and defend the poor. More and more power is taken away and there is much more centralism and dictatorship. I hope that the amendment is successful.

Mr. Spearing: These amendments seek to ameliorate the draconian powers that the Secretary of State is taking for himself in the Bill. I cannot see any reason why these relatively mild ameliorations should not be accepted. I do not think that the Secretary of State has understood the powers that he is taking in clause 1.

Some years ago, I was involved in the hearings of a railway closure tribunal. The chairman of the tribunal gave a ruling on what an Act of Parliament meant. He said, "The Minister of Transport says that that part of the Act does not mean what counsel says it means". Someone said, "That is nonsense. The Secretary of State cannot interpret the Act. Only the court can do that." As I understand it—the Secretary of State will correct me if I am wrong — that is not true in relation to this legislation. I thought that that constitutional principle applied to the liberties of the individual—in this case, a ratepayer in respect of certainty of local government, its efficiency and effectiveness. The Minister for Local Government knows from his experience that, unless one plans ahead in local government, there will not be the consistency and efficiency of operation which we all want. The liberty of the subject and of the bodies corporate is under threat. That interpretation has not been breached — my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) mentioned 1668, an important year — except, conceivably, in time of war, and I doubt whether even then it has been breached. But that happens in the Bill.

Mr. Ridley: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here when I spoke to the amendment, but, even if he was, he does not seem to have heard me. I think that, if he had listened, he would agree that he has the wrong brief.

Mr. Spearing: I shall certainly read what the Secretary of State said. But I am not speaking from a brief. I am speaking from the heart and from common sense about what concerns the majority of people in recipient areas.

The Secretary of State is trying to operate a system which was initiated under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is wrong. In Committee, we made it clear that this system would not work. The multipliers, which have been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), were introduced. We said that the combination of the operations introduced by that legislation would be impractical.

Year by year, Act by Act, the Secretary of State has tried not only to make the legislation work but to operate it politically. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has made that clear. We can understand that approach up to a point. But in trying to operate those two desiderata, one clearly comes up against court judgments. The local authorities, in trying to get out of the lobster pot into which the Secretary of State put them, clearly used their constitutional rights to go to the courts. Over a period, there is greater and greater court activity over a wider interface of statutes. The more statutes there are, the wider the interface and the greater the potential for appeal to the courts. That is what has happened. There have been court cases because of that.

Now there is only one way out, and the Secretary of State has taken it. The right hon. Gentleman says that this is not just a rate-capping measure; it is a court-capping measure. He says, "I am going to stop the nonsense of the continuous appeals and proliferation of legislation. I shall determine what the law is in future." That is the purpose of clause 1. In these amendments we are saying that we do not like that, but it should not apply at least in respect of those cases which are already in train. I should have thought that anyone with any common sense would say, "Even if we agree, as the Minister for Local Government clearly does, with the general principle of court capping, it should not be done retrospectively in those cases already in train."

Of course, there is a consquential problem. Let us suppose that the court cases in train decide in favour of the local authorities and not in favour of the Secretary of State — which would not surprise any of us in view of the history of these matters. The Secretary of State is then left with an anomaly. The law is interpreted by the courts, and that may be contrary to the contents of the Bill. One borough — perhaps Greenwich or Islington — may have an apparent undue advantage in terms of the law. The Secretary of State says, "We cannot have that because the new laws which I am imposing on local authorities are meant to be uniform." He is left with only one alternative — he must make not only prospective determinations of the law, which is bad enough, but determinations in respect of cases that are in train. We say that at least there should be some amelioration by including these amendments in the Bill to protect the rights of the subjects involved in cases already in train in the courts.

Mr. O'Brien: I wish to speak to this group of amendments because of my experience in local government and the problems of those serving local government — officers and members — who are trying to provide services for the people in their communities. The laws that govern local authorities handicap and hinder their work. If the Bill is passed in its present form, there will be further problems for those who serve local government. We must ensure that legislation is so framed that it gives local authorities and those who serve them the best possible chance to make sure that the service which they provide is in the best interests of their communities.

I refer especially to amendment No. 2A. The Government are trying to take from local authorities the opportunity to obtain justice. The Secretary of State wants to make decisions which would not be permitted by a court.

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have heard my speech on the amendment when I made it clear that that is not the case. Did he hear what I said?

8 pm

Mr. O' Brien: We all heard what the Secretary of State said. If what he said was true, why does he not accept the amendment which would clearly show that his intention is not what we believe it to be? If the Secretary of State is saying that we are wrong, I put it to him that the amendment would clear away all elements of doubt. Therefore, I ask him to accept amendment No. 2A.

It is a fact that the Government's policy of controlling local government finance is now a complete shambles and a complete mess. As a result of the Government's proposals for controlling rate contributions through the rate support grant, the fire and civil defence authority in west Yorkshire is experiencing great problems in trying to provide adequate services and protection in the coming year. The Secretary of State is fully aware of the problems facing that authority and also of the tremendous shortfall in the resources that are needed for the coming year if the local authority is to provide adequate services.

If the legislation is allowed to continue in its present form, and if this group of amendments is not accepted, the problems that face the authorities in west Yorkshire—especially the police authority—will intensify and the services that are provided to the local communities will be reduced.

If this group of amendments is accepted, the problems that face my colleagues who serve those various authorities, including the police authority, will be eased. It would also give them a ray of hope and lighten the problems that they have reported to the Secretary of State.

If the Bill is enacted, the services that they are expected to provide will no longer be available. The Bill comes from a Government who talk about reducing crime and providing better services and protection to local communities, but those things are not happening in west Yorkshire because of the Secretary of State's attempts to rate-cap and control the finances of local authorities.

As I have said, the Government's control of local authority finance is a complete mess, but the Bill is not confined to sorting out that mess. It gives substantial additional powers to the Secretary of State to intervene in local authority accounting, to introduce rate capping for 1987-88 by formula, and to exclude the courts from reviewing those decisions.

Transport authorities in west Yorkshire are being affected and elderly and infirm people who rely on public transport will also be affected by the proposals that are at present under consideration. The Bill will worsen the conditions under which the transport authorities in west Yorkshire have to provide public transport. If this group of amendments is not accepted, my colleagues who try to provide those services in west Yorkshire will encounter greater difficulties in ensuring that a continuous service is provided to the communities in the five metropolitan districts of west Yorkshire.

A recent announcement referred to the amount of money that would be available for highway and road purposes in my area, and especially in the metropolitan district of Wakefield. Rate capping and cuts in resources will mean that local authorities will be unable to provide the necessary protection and services to the community. That is why we believe that the powers that the Secretary of State is taking further control the services that local government wishes to provide. On more than one occasion local electors have demonstrated through the ballot box that they require those services that the Labour groups on local authorities have included in their manifestos, I refer especially to Leeds and Wakefield. However, the Secretary of State wishes to take unto himself powers to intervene in local authority accounting, and to introduce rate capping for the current year.

There is such confusion about the current position that it is wrong for the Government to use the Bill to impose even more arbitrary solutions. The Secretary of State should think carefully about the issues raised in the Bill and about the points raised by my hon. Friends on this group of amendments because those comments are relevant to the services that local authorities wish to provide.

In the area that I represent, and especially in Wakefield, we wish to help the 16 per cent. of the population who are unemployed. In this legislation, the Secretary of State is causing further problems to those authorities that are trying to provide jobs and job opportunities for the unemployed, and especially for the young unemployed who have never had a job, by trying to take substantial additional powers to intervene in local authority accounting.

Amendment No. 2B states that the Secretary of State should report,

"setting out the dates, and any other details which he may consider relevant, of the legal advice that was received by him prior to the introduction of this Act with respect to the legal interpretation of 'relevant' and 'total' expenditure for Rate Support Grant purposes."

As a Member of Parliament representing an area of high unemployment, with public transport problems and facing the danger of a lack of proper protection and of police forces being unable to carry out their full responsibilities and duties to communities, I believe that Members of Parliament should have an opportunity to make representations on behalf of the people that we represent and our local authorities. We should be able to give a full and concise report of how those authorities will be affected by the "relevant" and "total" expenditure for rate support grant purposes.

If the House does not accept the amendments that we propose, the facilities available to local authorities will be worsened. The relationship between the communities and the local authorities which serve them will deteriorate because the necessary services will not be provided. Therefore, this group of amendments should be given serious consideration. The Secretary of State should take on board all the points that have been made by those hon. Members with local authorities that are experiencing difficulties. Every week, hon. Members meet their constituents and hear their complaints about lack of services. The lack of services is due to the attitude of the Secretary of State. He will not provide the resources necessary to enable local authorities to carry out the services. I ask the Secretary of State to consider seriously the group of amendments and to support the amendments that have been proposed by my colleagues.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I apologise to the Committee for not having heard the Secretary of State. I wish to pursue the question of the relationship between the Bill, the amendments, and the work of the Select Committee and the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. I have looked with some care at the sections dealing with the question of the Secretary of State taking additional powers. I can understand that he is trying to stop judges

making decisions that he might not like. Since he has got the law wrong on several occasions, I can appreciate that he may want to eliminate judges. However, will he explain whether he also intends to eliminate the scrutiny of the House? Most of the rate support grant legislation is implemented by orders. The first line of clause 6 says:

"For the purposes of any order made before the passing of this Act".

As I understand it, the orders are normally scrutinised by the Joint Committee or the Select Committee, depending on whether they are affirmative money orders or whether they are simply enabling——

Mr. Chris Smith: Is it not the case that that applies not only to orders made before the enactment of the Bill, and that it may well include orders made after the enactment of the Bill under clause 6(3) which relates to the designation of an authority for rate capping for the financial year 1987-88? The Secretary of State will have to make orders to implement the formula contained in schedule 2 as part of that exercise of rate designation, and those orders will, by their very nature, have to be after the passing of the Act because they will have to enshrine the formula that is before us for the first time as part of the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: As I have said, the problem is that implementation of the legislation has to be done by orders and the orders are scrutinised by the Select Committee or the Joint Committee. Our terms of reference as a Committee are very narrow. We are supposed to see whether the legislation is legal. We are entitled to see whether it needs elucidation. We do not usually take that too far, especially in this sort of area since it is difficult to find an order on rates that is easy to understand. The Committee also has various other powers.

Having looked at the order, especially on the basis of advice from Speaker's Counsel and others, we are then entitled to make a report to the House and, if it is the Joint Committee, to the House of Lords. It is the normal procedure that if we draw the House's attention to something that is ultra vires, the Government withdraw it and bring in a new order, usually with an an apology. We have very little power to force the Government to do that but it would be foolish for the Government to continue with an order that has been pointed out to be ultra vires because they know that it could be subject to a challenge in the courts fairly quickly and that the courts would cause far more trouble for the Minister than we as a Committee. Therefore, the back-up for the Select Committee and the Joint Committee is the fact that, although we can produce reports, anyone who is aggrieved can challenge the order in the courts.

8.15 pm

As I understand the Bill, especially clause 4(6) and clause 6(4), the Government are taking away the powers of judges to overturn decisions. If the Government had made it clear by saying that anything that was deemed to be illegal was in fact legal, which is in effect what they are trying to do, it would have bound the Select Committee and the Joint Committee. However, the Government are not saying that anything that is ultra vires shall be intra vires. They say that that will apply only if they are challenged in the courts. Therefore, the Government are taking away from us the back-up power of the courts.

The Secretary of State may say that that does not apply because the Government will be able to quote this Bill and be able to make all the orders as a result of this legislation. I accept that the citations for statutory instruments that will be prepared in the future will include previous legislation plus this legislation. However, I am not sure how one would put this legislation into the citations if the statutory instruments are made before the Bill is enacted. That presents problems with the orders that have been laid this year insofar as they will be made legal by the legislation. It will be the duty of the Select Committee or the Joint Committee to report on the orders if they are ultra vires.

I should like an explanation from the Secretary of State as to how this Bill makes the statutory instruments legal as opposed to taking away the power of the courts to rule that they are illegal. The problem of the statutory instruments is another illustration of the way in which the Government now seem to want to go beyond any legal framework that we have been used to in the House and to be able to say, "This is the money we are giving out and we do not want to face any challenge." If that is the procedure that the Government want, why shroud it in complications?

The Secretary of State should say honestly, "This is the way I am going to dish out the money. It has nothing to do with any principles of need or resources within a community. It is purely my arbitrary decision as Secretary of State. These are the authorities I like and these are the authorities I dislike." Why put so much mumbo-jumbo and confusion into the system when that is basically what the Secretary of State is doing? Why does he not come clean and make it clear that he is handing out the money to the authorities he likes, that he is not giving it to the authorities he dislikes, that it is purely arbitrary and that there is no rhyme or reason to it? Perhaps then he will go a little further and say that part of the reason for the legislation, as I suggested previously, is that he is doing his best to discredit the system of rates in Britain. He wants to demonstrate that it is complicated and absurd, so that he will build up more pressure for the abolition of rates.

I am not a great enthusiast for the rates, but I suggest that, until the Secretary of State finds an alternative way of raising local finance, he is setting out to undermine local democracy. As long as he cannot come up with a better alternative that retains the democratic right of local people to raise money and to receive an allocation of national resources to meet the needs of their locality, he is continuing to undermine local democracy. The more he undermines local democracy, the more he is paving the way for the undermining of national democracy.

The Government seem to be claiming that they cannot trust local politicians and that appears to be the basis of the Secretary of State's allocation of resources. He seems to disapprove of some local authorities. He does not trust some local politicians and he is critical of them. As long as the Secretary of State continues to undermine local politicians in that way, he is claiming that the electorate cannot be trusted. The logic of that is that, if one cannot trust the electorate to elect local councillors, why should the electorate be trusted to elect anyone else?

The Secretary of State is undermining democracy. He will have a great deal to account for in future in the way in which he has damaged the whole concept of local democracy. When the Secretary of State replies, I hope that he will make it clear that he believes in local democracy and the rights of people to elect people with whom he disagrees. I hope that he will state that he

[Mr. Bennett]

believes that some people must put up with decisions that they do not like and that, on occasion, local authorities will want to spend money in ways that do not meet with his approval; yet they have every right to do that, because they have been elected.

As the Secretary of State is seeking to make the legislation bypass the courts, can he tell us whether he is trying to make it bypass the Standing Orders of the House that ensure the proper scrutiny of statutory instruments? If he is removing the back-up power of the courts, what power does he intend the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments to have to draw attention to the fact that some of his regulations will be ultra vires? I hope that the Minister can satisfy me at least on my second point, if not on my first.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I want to reinforce the argument by introducing a voice from south Yorkshire. I will come later to such items as the fire service and transport in south Yorkshire.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), I want to refer to the erosion of democracy that has taken place in the House over the past five or six years. A main theme of our debates recently has been the erosion of democracy — the centralisation of power through the removal of power from local government to central Government. The Bill is a further step in that direction.

The Secretary of State believes that he is above the law. Indeed, if he is not already above the law, he seeks to make himself so. Under the provisions in the Bill, those local authorities which believe that they have been wronged will no longer have the opportunity to take the Secretary of State to court.

Mr. Ridley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McKay: The Secretary of State is shaking his head. However, the fact remains that we could not have conceived of this situation 12 months ago. However, it has happened because the Secretary of State and his predecessors decided for, some reason or other, that central Government know best. They decided not to trust the local electorate who choose the people to look after their area. Central Government are now determining what should happen in the areas.

I have no argument with a Government of any political persuasion deciding that they have a certain amount of money to give to local government. That is a decision for central Government. However, I would probably argue about the sum that they allocated, but that is a different matter. Not only have the Government decided that they will not allocate the money to local government; they have decided that local government will not be able to raise the money to make up for what it has lost.

The Government have gone a step further. If local government decides to challenge the Secretary of State in court, the Secretary of State has refused to allow local government that right. The Bill will make unlawful what was a lawful procedure before it was introduced. It is only a short step for the Secretary of State to carry on from that position and make a similar provision in future. The Government have taken away local government redress against central Government diktat.

I have always believed, and will always believe, that the law of this country is divorced and separate from any entity. It must be so to act impartially. I may not agree with some of the conclusions reached by the law, but I agree that the law should have the ability and the right to act impartially. However, the Bill contains provisions which will niggle at the edges of that right and the Committee should consider what is happening.

Any Secretary of State may adopt the kind of powers included in the Bill. However, I am concerned about the principle and why the Secretary of State has chosen to use the power. He has chosen to adopt these powers simply because he was wrong in the past, was challenged and lost. He has determined that certain decisions will not be taken.

I want to consider a sample from my local authority in respect of the determination of the figures. The figures are determined wrongly. Under the provisions in the Bill, a local authority will not be able to take the Secretary of State to court over the cuts that he has caused. I will consider the figures in detail later because I want to highlight the way in which the figures have gone wrong. However, we must accept the amendments because, by not accepting them, we accept a dilution of the present free and democratic structure.

Mr. Tony Banks: I want to consider amendment No. 85.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has spoken before.

Mr. Banks: Yes; this is the second time that I have addressed the Committee and I understand that I am in order. The Secretary of State seems to imply that it is surprising for an hon. Member to speak twice. I am not speaking twice because I want to drone on or because I am enamoured by the sound of my own voice. When I spoke previously I referred specifically to the Greenwich case. I do not want to tax the Committee, but I want to make some general points about this part of the Bill and amendment No. 85 will enable me to to that.

Mr. Allan Roberts: It might make for a better debate if some Conservative Members spoke for the first time or if Tory Members attended this important Committee. Only the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving), with his particular interest and passion for local government and local government democracy, who is not famous for supporting the Government, is in attendance. The only other Conservative Members present are Ministers and their parliamentary private secretaries. That is how lightly the Conservatives treat this important Bill.

Mr. Banks: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. However, it is clear from the languid pose adopted by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving) that he is not evincing much passion in respect of the Bill. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) has made the point. This Bill is not the most fascinating topic that we could come to grips with. The empty Conservative Benches and the not too full Opposition Benches bear witness to that. We should speak the truth in Committee as we should in the House. The truth is that this is pretty boring stuff—and that includes my speech.

Mr. Michie: I agree with my hon. Friend's last point. However, does he agree that it is not really fair to criticise Conservative Back-Bench Members for not being present as they do not really agree with the Bill but are frightened to say so?

Mr. Banks: I wish that that was the case. The truth is that we simply do not have the expertise in the House to deal with the constant interferences in the day-to-day affairs of town halls, nor do we have the interest.

The Conservative Benches are devoid of human life form. I exclude, of course, those on the Front Bench. It would be too unkind to say that they did not correspond with a known life form. When amendment No. 2A is decided on, hundreds of hon. Members will flood in, but none of them will know what has been discussed. They will not have the foggiest idea.

The Temporary Chairman (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. This is an abuse of the Committee when there are so many amendments under consideration. I understand that the hon. Member wishes to speak to amendment No. 85.

Mr. Banks: I do, but I was tempted into a far more interesting area of discourse and speculation. If my hon. Friends do not expose me to the one thing which I cannot resist, which is temptation, I shall deal with amendment No. 85 which proposes, in clause 4, page 5, line 7, at end add

'save those decisions of a court in respect of litigation before the courts on 12th January.'.

We are asking the Secretary of State to make exceptions of local authorities which have already started litigation in respect of previous decisions made by the Secretary of State. That seems perfectly reasonable.

Ministers and Conservative Members always say that local authorities should be aware of the sums of money that they spend on behalf of their ratepayers and that they have a fiduciary responsibility and should not waste money. That takes us into political opinion and speculation. No responsible lawyer in a local authority encourages a local authority to proceed in the courts if it is a complete waste of time because there is no chance of success. No legal department was aware that the Secretary of State would introduce the Bill and change the name of the game in respect of previous rate support grant settlements.

In fairness to the legal advice given by legal officers, and in fairness to ratepayers, who have already committed a great deal of money to briefing counsel and preparing the necessary documents—we know how much that costs—it would seem fair that local authorities should be allowed to proceed. They might get some advantage from the amendments whereas others might not. I do not know whether that takes us into arguments about hybridity, but it seems only equitable that local authorities should be able to proceed with the litigation that they started before 12 January—the date of the Bill's Second Reading.

8.30 pm

Mr. Straw: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on introducing some humour into the debate—a difficult task bearing in mind the subject matter. Amendment No. 2A addresses the proceedings that Greenwich has brought against the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West went into some detail about how Greenwich would be adversely affected if the Bill went through unamended. I do not want to repeat everything that he said in his first speech but I should like to put some points on the record.

First, Greenwich is a relatively low-spending authority. Its expenditure per head—I speak from memory—was £331 in 1985-86, some £150 per head less than Hammersmith and Fulham, which was then Conservative-controlled. It was always a grave injustice to Greenwich that it should have been so rate-capped. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West said, Greenwich was rate-capped and suffered some quite gratuitous penalties. The first concerned Bromley, which complained to the Secretary of State about one year ago that it was not getting enough allowance in rate support grant terms for taking over additional highways on abolition of the Greater London council. The then Secretary of State decided to give Bromley the money and take it away from other authorities. Greenwich lost £3,828,000 of grant in 1986-87.

Secondly, Greenwich received much less for the GLC services that it took over than the cost of those services. It estimates the cost at £24 million whereas it has received only £20·5 million in grant. There have been other problems, including an allowance of only £138,000 for expenditure in respect of land drainage, whereas it has had to pay out £769,000 over which it has had absolutely no control.

Greenwich made its rate-cap challenge. The Secretary of State said that Greenwich won the rate-cap challenge on something that was not central to the points that it was taking to court. That is the nature of court action. One sends out about five shots and scores one hit. It is not for the Secretary of State to complain about that as it is entirely legitimate and how the courts work. Greenwich won its action as, we believe, Islington would. The Secretary of State consented to judgment.

I hope that when we debate schedule 2 and clause 7, the Secretary of State will have the grace to accept that it was wrong to rate-limit Greenwich under the legislation, as everybody else thought it was. If the legislation had stood, the Secretary of State would not have been able to continue to rate-cap Greenwich. He has said that the only purpose of the Bill is to make the law what everybody thought it was, so it must be wrong to continue to rate-cap Greenwich.

Mr. Ridley: That is an absurd argument. Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that, on that analogy, I could not rate-cap anybody or pay any rate support grant? He is asking whether, just because he is chummy with Greenwich, I make an exception for it.

Mr. Straw: I am saying that Greenwich took a court action against the Secretary of State on a perfectly sound point and the courts found in favour of Greenwich and that that decision ought to be allowed to stand.

Mr. Ridley: The courts would have found that there was no basis whatever for the definition of total expenditure, and therefore any case which was brought on the subject of total expenditure would have failed. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that Greenwich did not bring a case on the total expenditure point—it just happened to come up.

Mr. Straw: Greenwich could not possibly have won the point unless it pleaded it. There is no way in which the court could have made a decision on a point unless it was argued before the judge. Judges do not normally tell plaintiffs that they disagree with the points that they have raised and that there is a better one, and this is what it is. Greenwich was well advised, took a point and won.

Mr. Chris Smith: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend in his flow but is not the precise point as it applies to both Greenwich and Islington the fact that in the one case the Secretary of State was found to be at fault by the court and in the other case would have been found to be at fault because of the problem relating to total expenditure? However, the nub of both cases is different from the point relating to total expenditure. The real issue in relation to Greenwich was multipliers and in relation to Islington it was the 12·5 per cent. figure above GREA. Introducing this legislation, which the Secretary of State claims has to do with total expenditure, the Secretary of State has managed to include both authorities under the legislation and ignore those other points which the authorities legitimately raised.

Mr. Straw: I think that the implication of my hon. Friend's point is that if Greenwich had had the chance to argue properly the multiplier issue it might have won. Similarly, if Islington had had the chance to argue that its GRE is below the 12·5 per cent. trigger point, it, too, would have won. I agree with my hon. Friend that if the two cases had been allowed to be argued on the central merits that the plaintiffs have raised, those authorities would have won.

Let us turn to the more serious aspects of this group of amendments as it relates to clauses 4 and 6 of the Bill. Clause 4, in respect of the rate support grant, and clause 6, in respect of the Rates Act 1984, seek to validate decisions which are taken by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act and to exclude the Secretary of State from any subsequent court action in respect of decisions that he has made. Given that the ostensible and innocent purpose of the Bill is to clear up a legislative mess—a mess of the Government's making going back over seven years—one can understand why the Secretary of State is seeking to validate decisions which had been made on the basis of the law as everybody thought it was but, as it turns out, was not. Even if we do not agree with the detail of the Bill, we can understand why the Secretary of State is seeking to do that.

However, having validated such decisions, the Secretary of State then seeks to exclude the courts from checking whether the newly validated decisions have been made in accordance with the law. The Secretary of State seeks to make light of the decisions which he can make under clauses 4 and 6 of the Bill. It is important for us to understand the wide nature of the powers which the Secretary of State can exercise under these clauses and in respect of which he is not subject—as he hopes—to any kind of check from the courts.

Clause 4(2) defines the relevant provisions which are set out in 4(1) as:

> "Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act for the purpose of the relevant provisions in relation to any of the initial years or intermediate years shall be deemed to have been done in compliance with those provisions."

The relevant provisions are part VI of the 1980 Act, section 8 of and schedule 2 to the Local Government Finance Act 1982, sections 2 and 3 of the Education Act 1986 and section 2 of the Rate Support Grants Act 1986. The Secretary of State is aware that part VI of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and a further substantial chunk of that Act deal with the whole structure of the present rate support grant. They deal with matters such as clause 53.

> "Introduction of new system of rate support grants."

Clause 54

> "The aggregate amount of rate support grants."

Clause 55

> "The domestic rate relief grant."

Clause 56

> "The block grant."

There is a great chunk on the block grant.

Clause 57

> "Determination of grant-related poundage and grant-related expenditure."

Clause 58

> "Principles for determination of grant-related poundage."

Clause 59

> "Adjustments of distribution of block grant."

Clause 60

> "The Rate Support Grant Report.

Clause 61

> "Supplementary reports."

Clause 62

> "Adjustment of block grant total."

Clause 63

> "Adjustment of block grant in connection with education, etc."

Clause 64

> "Special provisions for Metropolitan Police District."

I have read those titles out to illustrate to the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends the breadth of powers concerning which the Secretary of State is having separate provisions written into the Bill to validate all past acts.

8.45 pm

The other powers are included in section 8 and schedule to the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Schedule 2 is all to do with the block grant for the receiver of the Metropolitan police. Other powers are contained in sections 2 and 3 of the Education Act 1986 and, to cap it all, section 2 of the Rate Support Grants Act 1986. My hon. Friends will recall that that Act was supposed to be the final solution to the unlawfulness and the lacunae of the 1980 Act. That Act states

> "As respects determinations made under section 59"—

I have just read out that section—

> "of the said Act of 1980 after the passing of this Act the following provisions shall have effect instead of subsection (6)(a) of that section and section 8(3)(a) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982."

Under clause 6 of the Bill the Secretary of State is seeking to validate any decision which he makes in respect of the Rates Act until the passing of this Bill, which may take place in March or April. The Secretary of State has sought to suggest that as far as clause 4 is concerned the decisions which are being validated are decisions which he has already made but he must accept that as far as the Rate Acts are concerned these decisions could be prospective as well. In clause 6(2) and (3) it states:

> (2) Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act for the purposes of Part I of the 1984 Act in relation to the financial year beginning in 1985 or that beginning in 1986 shall be deemed to have been done in compliance with the provisions of that Part.
>
> (3) For the purposes of section 7 below and Schedule 2 to this Act—
>
> *(a)* any designation of an authority under section 2 of the 1984 Act in relation to the financial year beginning in 1987, and
>
> *(b)* any determination and notification under section 3(1) and (3) of that Act of a level for an authority's total expenditure in that year,
>
> shall, if made before the passing of this Act, be deemed to have been made in compliance with the provisions of Part I of the 1984 Act.

Clause 4 states that the judge-proof limit relates only to 4(1) but in clause 6 the judge-proof limit relates to all the powers which the Secretary of State has taken. In clause 6(4) it states:

(4) This section shall have effect notwithstanding any decision of a court (whether before or after the passing of this Act) purporting to have a contrary effect.

It is extremely dangerous and unnecessary for the Secretary of State to take the powers provided under clause 4(6) but at least I half understand his arguments. But what is his argument for taking the powers under clause 6(4)? It does not relate to past Acts but relates to the designation of individual authorities. Do individual authorities that have been rate-capped have a right to go to the court if they believe the Secretary of State has exercised his power unlawfully? Rate-capping has an adverse effect upon individual authorities and it is possible that the Secretary of State or his legal advisers may have made a wrong decision in respect of designation, the determination of the expenditure limit or total expenditure.

Mr. Dobson: It is more than likely.

Mr. Straw: In those circumstances, is it not right that the authority should be able to go to court? What possible administrative mischief is the Secretary of State seeking to avoid by preventing authorities from going to court? What is he scared of, given that he says that in other respects he is ready and willing to let local authorities go to court to challenge his decisions?

On the general issue of these judge-proof clauses the Secretary of State wants to brush aside the enormity of what he is doing. I cannot examine the inner workings of his mind and it may be that he believes that what he is doing in clauses 4(6) and 6(4) is innocent and trivial. It is neither innocent nor trivial. The only ways in which the rule of law can be protected—and all of us live by the rule of law — is first by an elected Parliament and secondly by having courts to supervise the decisions of the Executive to ensure that the decisions that they make are made fairly and within the law.

I should like to quote from Wade on administrative law. It talks of a leading case called the anisminic case, and says that that case and it sequels were:

"The culmination of the judicial insistence, so often emphasised in this work, that administrative agencies and tribunals"—

that includes Ministers—

"must at all costs be prevented from being sole judges of the validity of their own acts. If this were allowed, to quote Denning Lord Justice again, 'the rule of law would be at an end."

It then goes on to quote Lord Wilberforce expressing the same idea in different words. In a case in 1933 Lord Atkin said in objecting to what he described as finality clauses in legislation:

"Finality is a good thing but justice is better."

Essentially, that is the view that we hold. I should like to quote again from Lord Denning from his work, "What Next in the Law?" In that work he discusses the discretion of Ministers and says that Ministers may sometimes say:

"The statute gives me an unfettered discretion. It cannot be challenged in the courts of law. If I should exercise it wrongly, I can be questioned in the House. But the courts cannot restrain me."

Lord Denning goes on to explain how the courts have indeed taken powers to supervise the work of Ministers even where Ministers have sought to preclude that supervision. He quotes what he said in Laker's case in 1977 which was an action taken against a Labour Minister. It is right that Labour as well as Conservative Ministers should be subject to the courts no matter how uncomfortable the court decisions may be. In that case the court said:

"These courts have the authority—and I would add the duty—in a proper case, when called upon, to inquire into the exercising of a discretionary power by a minister or his department. If it is found that this power has been exercised improperly or mistakenly so as to infringe unjustly on the legitimate rights and interests of the subject, then these courts must so declare. They stand, as ever, between the executive and the subject, as Lord Atkin said in a famous passage, alert to see that any coercive action is justified in law. To which I would add: be alert to see that a discretionary power is not exceeded or misused."

The rate support grant legislation contains page after page of discretionary power in the hands of Ministers. Parliament has accepted that that discretion should be given to Ministers. It is a powerful weapon, but as Lord Denning and Wade have said it should be subject to the supervision of the courts.

The Secretary of State is breaching a major constitutional principle. He is not breaching it for very much because he seems to be saying that this Bill has now got the law straight. If the law is straight, there need not be any legal challenges and he need not not make a judgment. If the law is not straight it is essential that the courts should be able to intervene and protect local authorities, the subject, from unjust and arbitrary discretion by Ministers. That is why we object to these provisions and why we shall force them to a vote.

Mr. Ridley: I shall be brief because I have spoken already and I do not want to take up the time of the Committee. As I said to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), I should prefer to deal with the Birmingham point separately. There are amendments relating to it and I shall return to that when the time is reached. I see that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) is not in his place. Many speakers in the debate come and go, but not many listened to what I said on the first occasion. Practically the only one who did so was the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Ms. Clare Short *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: It is not a matter of whether the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) or the hon. Member for Ladywood were here but whether in their speeches they showed the faintest recognition of the points that I have sought to make. The Committee does not have too good a record on that. The hon. Member for Leeds, West and a number of hon. Members missed the point that if one looks at clause 4(1) which must be read in relation to the powers contained in clause 4(6) about judge-proof past actions, one sees that it says:

"Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act".

It is only in relation to actions taken before this Act was published that anything I do escapes challenge.

Mr. Tony Banks: Passed, not published.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, because since the Act was published I have done nothing nor will I do anything in the sense of this clause. I have taken no

[Mr. Ridley]

actions whatever in relation to the rate support grant settlement since the time that I realised it would be illegal for me to do so.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is the Bill which has been published, not an Act, and although the Secretary of State has taken no decisions he must get it quite clear that one publishes a Bill, not an Act.

Mr. Ridley: This does not give me the powers that hon. Members thought it did, that I could affect future things without my decisions being subject to review by the courts. That is not the case because it is only what I have done hitherto which is validated, not what I might do in future.

9 pm

Mr. Spearing: This is the needle point which the Secretary of State picked up during my remarks. Has the right hon. Gentleman not taken the point on board? Will he reply to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that clause 6(4) is prospective? The wording of that subsection makes it clear:

"before or after the passing of this Act, purporting to have a contrary effect"

in respect of the effects of the whole of clause 6 which relates to the complicated provisions in schedule 2. Is that not prospective?

Mr. Ridley: Hitherto, I have been talking about clause 4. I was about to refer to clause 6, which is a rather different point, as I said on the first occasion. I must make it clear to the House that the Bill proposes that rate limitation and a pre-set limitation should be instituted by the schedule, which specifies both the authorities and the rate limits by reference to clause 6(3). That makes the Government's intention absolutely clear.

If the House passes the Bill to become an Act, those authorities and those expenditure limits, as amended or not by Parliament, will indeed be the statute law on rate limitation. Therefore, any concept that there can be a challenge to decisions in the courts is a challenge to Parliament because Parliament will have enacted the legislation and these will be the provisions.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Chris Smith *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: Let me complete my point. Any challenge may or may not take place both as to the designation—the Islington case—and as to any other matter to do with rate capping — the Greenwich case. Whatever happens in those cases, it must be superimposed by the statute power in the Bill to limit the rates or precepts of those authorities, and that must override any court action that takes place beforehand.

Mr. Chris Smith: With respect, the Secretary of State is talking nonsense. Any subsequent challenge to the designation or rate capping of a specific authority would be a challenge not to Parliament but to the exercise by the Secretary of State of general powers that are given to him by this statute and, in part, included in schedule 2, which does not specify individual authorities, except in a number of specific cases. It does not specify actual figures but it specifies formulae that will be subject to a report or an order to be tabled by the Secretary of State giving his administrative decision.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is right. The point made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is valid, too. Orders will be made after the passage of the Bill, which will be subject to the statutory instruments scrutiny procedures and will have the back-up of the courts, but they will be made under the Act—if, by then, it is an Act—and, therefore, the powers in the Act will enable those orders to be legal, and the courts will have to interpret them, if there is a challenge. They will be made under the powers of this legislation and not under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Straw: I refer the Secretary of State to the point that he made a moment ago. He said that the Bill had to be made judge-proof because a challenge to the courts would be a challenge not to Ministers but to Parliament. With great respect, it is a challenge, as it were, to the authority or to the nature of decisions made by Parliament and embodied in statute that forms the basis of every single application for judicial review. If what the Secretary of State said is right, he should argue that there should be no judicial review. Does the Secretary of State not understand that judicial review is about challenging the use of statutes, either by Ministers or by other people who have powers under statute?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman still does not seem to understand. If the Bill becomes an Act, the provisions about rate limitations will have statutory force. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that? If, in some way, there is to be a challenge to the present proposals on rate limitation, it will be prohibited only if the Bill becomes law. Clause 6 will not come into effect until the Bill becomes law. If, on the other hand, the Bill does not become law, there will be no restriction to the right to challenge. If the Bill becomes law, the rate-capping procedures will be as they are in the Bill, and the limits are there, so there is no conceivable point in a challenge that will be overtuned by the Bill. If the Bill does not become law, the challenge will not be upset. Of those Opposition Members who spoke in Committee——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: No, I shall not give way. I have already given way a great deal. A respectable number of Opposition Members did not hear my first speech and can be forgiven for having got it wrong. A less respectable number of Opposition Members heard my first speech but they have persisted in getting it wrong. Furthermore, the hon. Member for Blackburn realised that the Opposition were making a completely bogus point and climbed down.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 177, Noes 232.

Division No. 58] **[9.05 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Alton, David	Bermingham, Gerald
Anderson, Donald	Bidwell, Sydney
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Blair, Anthony
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Boyes, Roland
Ashton, Joe	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Barron, Kevin	Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Bruce, Malcolm
Bell, Stuart	Buchan, Norman

Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Cle'land, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Chope, Christopher
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John

Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Amendment proposed: No. 2B, in page 1, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection 1 of this section shall come into effect after the making of an Order by the Secretary of State, and no such Order shall come into effect until after the laying before Parliament by the Secretary of State of a report setting out the dates, and any other details which he may consider relevant, of the legal advice received by him prior to the introduction of this Act with respect to the legal interpretation of "relevant" and "total" expenditure for Rate Support Grant purposes.'.—*[Dr. Cunningham.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 180, Noes 230.

Division No. 59] **[9.15 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Chris Smith.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Chope, Christopher
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina

Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(Norfolk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kennath *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Pawsey, James
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Roesl, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

9.30 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 3, leave out subsections (3), (4) and (5).

This is not a mere probing amendment. If we are not satisfied with the Government's explanation for the presence of the subsections, we reserve the right to call a Division on it.

These are complex matters. Clause 1 is largely to do with the accountancy aspect of block grant and rate support grant. It may be helpful if I say something about what I understand to be the background to this matter. Since 1980, especially since the passage of the Rates Act 1984, the Government have had the notion that the more a council spends above a defined limit on the care, protection and welfare of its citizens, the more it should be penalised in the withdrawal of central Government assistance.

This has happened in my borough. I am sorry that I cannot give other examples, but there was not time to gather the facts on them. The time available has been extremely limited. On the principle of the more one needs, the less one gets, between 1979 and 1985, Lambeth lost grant totalling £113 million. In my borough—this is repeated in other places, such as Liverpool—in some years the penalty suffered has exceeded the inner city partnership allocation received by it. Despite the fact that the borough has been racked by unemployment, riot, homelessness and poverty, we are penalised for facing our responsibilities. The same is true of many other hard-pressed inner-city boroughs.

The measure of a council's profligacy in dealing with the problems which it faces — according to the Government, at any rate—is the rate revenue account. The Secretary of State is saying that some councils have invented an artificial income to disguise the true level of their expenditure. The clause will give the Secretary of State the power to regulate the contents of the income and the expenditure sides of the rate revenue account.

[Mr. John Fraser]

This is an odd development. If a person on supplementary benefit came into our advice bureaux and exaggerated his income and minimised his expenditure as a supplementary benefit claimant, we would think that he was taking leave of his senses. But such is the Alice-in-Wonderland world of local government finance that ostensible parsimony is rewarded. We are told that local authorities have been disguising their budgets by adding income to show that they are spending less money than they are. The Secretary of State should reward not notional parsimony but real parsimony by taking out what he regards as artificial items of income.

Subsections (3), (4) and (5), which we propose to leave out of the Bill, have not yet been amended by Government amendments. The Government amendments talk about "defined revenue expenditure" and "defined revenue income". It would be helpful during the debate on this amendment or on the next group of amendments if the Government told us what they mean by those terms.

Clause 2 gives the Secretary of State the power to specify what is and is not income and expenditure. In other words, he can alter the rules. Indeed, clause 2(4) states that he can define income and expenditure for "any" year. I presume that clause 2(4) means that he can act retrospectively or prospectively in specifying income and expenditure.

The wording of the Government amendments is curious. They do not use the phrase "specified expenditure" or "specified income", but "defined revenue income" or "defined revenue expenditure". It would be helpful to know why the word "defined" has been chosen. Do we need to consider some other statute or another part of the Bill to discover why the words "defined revenue expenditure" have been used?

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Secretary of State does not know, but clearly they mean what he says they mean.

Mr. Fraser: My hon. Friend says that they mean what the Secretary of State says they mean. Clause 2(4) makes it clear that income and expenditure are exactly what the Secretary of State chooses to specify. In choosing to specify their meaning in that way, the Secretary of State is not subject to any sort of parliamentary challenge, and is not obliged to submit any kind of order or regulation to the House, and the matter is therefore removed entirely from the control of this House.

I should like to ask the Government several questions about the accountancy provisions because, although they refer to "defined revenue expenditure" and "defined revenue income", they leave the Minister to decide exactly what is income and what is expenditure. The Government already have the power to prescribe forms for accounting and block grant purposes in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

Will the Minister tell the House why the Secretary of State is creating new powers to define or specify what is income and expenditure when, for other accounting purposes, those powers already exist in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act?

Secondly, if the Minister is saying that those provisions apply only to the calculation of block grants, can he demonstrate that safeguards exist in the Bill to limit the power of specifying — contained in clause 2(4) — for block grant purposes only, rather than for widely interfering or defining local government accounting?

Thirdly, what assurances can the Minister give concerning the Government's intention to use their powers? Will they be used solely for prescription for block grant purposes, and if they are to be used only for prescribing accountancy provisions for block grant purposes, will the Government accept an amendment providing that the powers are to be limited only to those purposes?

Fourthly, what assurance can the Minister give that the accounting provisions will not be used to pursue a policy of penalising the poor, because clause 2(4) makes it clear that they can be used retrospectively in that way? Clause 1 applies to accountancy provisions for any year, but the definition of expenditure and income given in clause 2(4) can apply to any year.

The provisions of clause 1 are obnoxious because they vest enormous discretion in the Minister without requiring parliamentary approval. That would not be tolerated in any other area of law. It certainly would not be tolerated in company law. If one wants to know what one has to put in one's income and expenditure accounts for the purposes of company law, one can turn to schedule 4 of the Companies Act 1985, where page after page states what should be contained in a balance sheet and what should be put in the income and expenditure or profit and loss accounts. Those matters are clearly defined and are not open, as far as I can see, to amendment by Ministers. They are well-established practices for commercial purposes and that is quite right because, if a Minister had the power to alter the definition of income and expenditure in Companies Acts, that could have a catastrophic effect on the company's tax position, on the profits on which it must pay tax, and on the view taken of the company by shareholders or creditors.

In exactly the same way, the alteration of the definition of income and expenditure under the Bill could well have a catastrophic effect on local authority finances, if the result of those definitions robbed local authorities of the block grant and support that they deserve for their citizens. That would not be tolerated under company law, and it would certainly not be tolerated under tax law because such provisions could be used for punitive purposes.

Let us imagine what would happen if the Treasury took the power to specify proper practices, accounting definitions or definitions of payment in deeds of covenant. Under a deed of convenant, one person promises to pay another person a certain amount of money and, if the recipient does not have any other form of taxable income, the Government subsidises him or her to the tune of 29p in every pound. That is a common arrangement between grandparents and children and especially between parents and adult children in order to provide for them during further education.

Let us imagine that the Treasury had the sort of power that the Department of the Environment is seeking in the Bill. It might say, "Although the deed of covenant has been concluded, the Government have decided that the cost of meeting the deed of covenant is so high that we are proposing that the Government will reimburse only those deeds of covenant that are made for the benefit of children attending public schools rather than for children attending

state schools." If anybody were to suggest such a thing, we would all recoil in horror and we would not be willing to accept it.

Mr. Dobson: Not this week.

Mr. Fraser: That is no different in principle from what the Government are proposing in the Bill.

The proposals, which, on the face of it, are mainly to do with accountancy, leave far too much discretion to Ministers and allow them to decide the way in which local authorities' accounts turn out and the sort of support they get from the Government. I understand that the Secretary of State was once a Treasury Minister. I suppose that being able to deem things as expenditure, income or otherwise may be a habit that he picked up from the Treasury by dealing with, for example, inheritance tax or capital transfer tax.

There is a story about a senior Treasury draftsman who bought his child a train set for Christmas. When the train set was set up, he found that he had failed to buy a transformer. His child was disappointed at not seeing the trains running. He said, "Don't worry, we do it all the time in the Treasury. These trains are deemed to pass in this direction and the others are deemed to pass in that direction. You should have an enjoyable time."

We object to the Secretary of State's proposition that he should be able to deem various items of expenditure. We do that for serious reasons. It is to do not with dry accountancy but with the needs and requirements of the poor, dispossessed, unemployed and homeless of the boroughs that many of us represent. That is the reason why we oppose the Bill and have tabled our amendments.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I should like to follow up the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). The provisions will affect my council, as I suspect they will affect councils up and down the country. What does the Minister intend to do with the discretion he is given in this clause about the local authorities which, as a result of the recent chaotic weather conditions, will have greatly increased expenditure? Will the Minister compensate the local authorities for the vast amounts of money they have had to pay out as a result of the flooding of houses, burst pipes and emergency services provided day and night?

The Minister tells us in other circumstances that the Government are providing a service that local people want. The truth is that they are not. They have put on to local authorities an increasingly chaotic and manic way of calculating rate support grant. The clause perpetuates that method and, as I understand it, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood has suggested, it gives a degree of discretion to the Minister who must now decide whether he will allow certain extra revenue expenditure.

Let us look at what has happened to some local authorities. I went round my own area yesterday. In one case, 300 houses are available which, largely because of cuts in the housing revenue, have not had satisfactory lagging and have therefore suffered burst pipes with water coming through. There are blocks of flats facing similar problems. The chairman of the housing committee, Councillor Jeff Kenner, has opened certain emergency accommodation. A school was opened and various other emergency measures have been taken. Standpipes were erected when pipes burst and people were taken into emergency accommodation.

At the same time, largely because of the crisis facing homeless people generally, the local authority opened up certain areas to accommodate single homeless people in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. I know that such action has been taken by other local authorities. That will not be cost-free. The Government want such action to be taken and they gave an undertaking in the House to examine the possibility of opening up the tube stations in London to homeless people. If the Government take the position that seriously, presumably they expect local authorities to take precisely the kind of action taken by my local authority and others.

9.45 pm

Will the Minister give me a commitment that expenditure of this type, whether incurred by the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham or by any other local authority, will not be taken into account in any other cuts that the Government may impose on authorities? In other words, will he give a commitment that the Government will make an exception of the special payments being invoked by local authorities at present to pay for the emergency services?

Will the Minister come forward with real money to enable local authorities to absorb the shock that has been imposed upon them by the severe weather and the homeless crisis facing London?

The Minister for Local Government (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): The comments by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) have nothing to do with the clause under consideration. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me, he can do so. However, if I were to answer his points, other hon. Members would raise similar questions about their local swimming pools, roofs and the rest. This is not on.

Mr. Soley *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: The hon. Gentleman's comments had nothing to do with the amendment. He has had a good try, he will have earned a mention in the local press and he has done his job. Obviously, he has earned five more votes for the next general election.

Mr. Soley: The Minister has made a stupid outburst. I have heard the Minister say some stupid things before, but the outburst that he has just made takes some beating.

Local authorities from one end of the country to another are suffering from the problems I have described. I have seen the problems that I have described in my area. However, my area is not unique, unless the Minister believes that the sun does not shine in Hammersmith and Fulham but it does in the rest of the country.

Dr. Boyson: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me on that point, which has nothing to do with my reply to the clause, he can do so. I am aware of the problems with regard to the weather that exists the length and breadth of the country, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and in practically every other constituency.

Amendment No. 5 removes three parts of the clause. As the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said, the provision relates back to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The definitions were brought in in the 1981-82 settlement. The definitions of total and relevant expenditure that were accepted were those suggested by the local authority associations as against the recommendations of the Department. The Ministers accepted

[Dr. Boyson]

the recommendations of the local authority associations and they were included. They stood the test of time until the situation arose in which there were certain court cases and different definitions that put at risk not all of the 1980 Act but simply the definitions of relevant and total expenditure.

The hon. Gentleman asked what was defined income. In essence, defined income is all revenue income except items credited to such other accounts as the housing revenue account and defined expenditure is all revenue expenditure except items debited to accounts such as the housing revenue account dealing with housing expenditure. Similarly, we could define total and relevant expenditure——

Mr. John Fraser: If there is a dispute about what is defined expenditure and income, who decides that dispute, the courts or the Minister?

Mr. Dobson: It is not in his brief.

Dr. Boyson: If it is not in my brief, I shall reply just the same. I have explained what the Government hold to be the definition of defined expenditure, but if people do not agree with it, it will be challenged. Such words have to be built into the Bill carefully as people have gone over previous legislation with magnifying glasses, and they will do so again.

Clause 1 does not enable the Secretary of State to control what local authorities spend. There is simply a requirement to keep an account. We have defined how the accounts should be kept working within the definitions that I have mentioned.

The hon. Member for Norwood said that this is a probing amendment. If it were accepted, it would be a wrecking amendment and the definitions would be destroyed. We are trying to make the definitions as watertight as possible. The amendment would delete that part of clause 1 which shows the nature of the rate fund revenue account. If amended, clause 1 would no longer serve its purpose of setting up the rate fund revenue account, which is the foundation of the definitions of relevant and total expenditure. The amendment would destroy the very basis of what we are doing, which is to incorporate in statute a method of calculating relevant and total capital expenditure which would allow us to maintain the status quo.

The hon. Member mentioned Lambeth. It spends 33 per cent. above grant-related expenditure. Its rate is 46 per cent. more than its class average. Rent arrears are 39 per cent. of what could be collected in one year, and the Lambeth laundry costs ratepayers £8 a wash as compared with the payment received of £1·50. The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill was Alice in Wonderland. I suggest that such economics is Alice in Wonderland.

Mr. Fraser: Now will the Minister reply to the debate? I asked him who settles the issue if there is a difference of opinion about what is to be defined expenditure for the purpose of income expenditure. We have the word "defined" without any definition.

The Minister asked me why expenditure in Lambeth is rather higher than in some adjoining and more affluent boroughs. The answer has been provided by an independent urban research centre called CES Ltd. It has described what has happened to the inhabitants of Lambeth during the past few years. I can tell the Minister what has gone wrong—we have had a Tory Government.

The average standard of living of 96,000 households in Lambeth, as measured by their gross income before tax, decreased by 5 per cent., allowing for inflation, between 1979 and 1984. During the same period, average income in the country as a whole rose by 4 per cent. There is a 9 per cent. difference between average incomes in Lambeth and the rest of the country.

Unemployment in Lambeth increased from about 5 per cent. in 1979 to 20 per cent. in 1985. There is 25 per cent. male unemployment in the borough. That also has happened since 1979. Lower income households have experienced a decline of 10 per cent. in their income before tax since 1979 and some other groups have experienced a 7 per cent. increase in income. In the category of households of working age that support families, 45 per cent. are represented in the poorest 25 per cent. of the national average. They have experienced a great drop in their incomes. The Minister asked why Lambeth is different. It is because it has been continually impoverished and penalised since we have had a Tory Government. Perhaps the Minister will reply to the real point that I raised in the debate.

Dr. Boyson: The answer is perfectly straightforward —ultimately it rests with the courts. We have defined what we believe to be the answer in the Bill. The Bill, once it becomes an Act, is dependent for its ultimate analysis on court definitions.

Mr. Fraser: Does that mean that the Government will not use clause 2(4) to specify what is income and expenditure? Will it be left to the courts, and will the Minister drop clause 2(4)?

Dr. Boyson: It is certainly obvious to the dispassionate observer that any Government who are putting a Bill together do so on the basis of the intentions that they wish to achieve. The Bill has come together as a whole and includes the two clauses referred to by the hon. Gentleman. They are part and parcel of the Bill and obviously intended in the way the Bill was drafted by the Government and we hope that the Bill becomes an Act.

Mr. Hancock: We have to ask ourselves whether, before too long, we shall have one local authority after another queueing up to take the Government to court to test the definitions in the Bill. No one would suggest that that was right, and that cannot be the Minister's ambition in his wish to see the Bill pushed through.

I take the Minister back two years when Portsmouth city council was rate-capped. It was the only Conservative local authority to be rate-capped in that year and it was absolutely bewildered. I remember the heartache and crocodile tears of Portsmouth's Conservative politicians. It could not possibly be that the council had spent too much on creating jobs because it had not. It could not be that it had spent too much on creating better housing because it had not. It could not be that it had provided better services for the elderly because it had not. What the council had done, and it was repeated time and time again, was that it had followed, virtually to the letter, the Government's instructions about the way in which local government financing should be accounted for.

It was a bewildering situation wherein the local authority was caught in a net cast out by the Government.

Despite repeated attempts by hon. Members representing Portsmouth, the leader of the council, and the Conservative Association of Portsmouth to find out why the council had been rate-capped, a satisfactory explanation has never been received.

The suggestion is that Portsmouth was only caught in that net because the Government had missed Sheffield the first time round. The only way in which they would get Sheffield in the rate-cap net was to extend that net slightly further and in doing so they embraced Portsmouth. Thus the Government killed two birds with one stone and claimed that rate capping was an impartial, unbiased selection of local authorities — Labour-controlled Sheffield and Conservative-controlled Portsmouth. It was to be seen as the Government's bipartisan approach to local government finance.

Why do we need further controls? The clauses use the words "proper practices". I would be interested if the Minister could explain what proper practice means. What is intended by those words? How will that phrase be defined in Government terms?

Under existing law auditors are already required to make sure that local councils conduct their accounting in a proper way. Is the Minister saying that that law is inefficient? If so, surely the Government should get their own house in order. Very few hon. Members would disagree that Government accounting leaves a lot to be desired. Creative accountability is not solely in the domain of local government.

Surely over the past two years we have recognised that the Government are extremely clever in their creative accounting when it comes to trying to hide or shift responsibility. They have tried privatisation and contracting out various types of work, and shifting capital to revenue is a classic example. If they were subjected to the same scrutiny as that which is suggested for local government, the Committee would be surprised at some of the results. I hope that at some other time the Minister will try to use what influence he has to suggest that a similar exercise could be carried out.

What is wrong with the current system and the accountability and the way in which local government finance is put together and checked? If the Minister thinks that auditors are not doing a proper job now, how will he define——

It being Ten o'clock, The CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Local Government Finance Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Local Government Finance Bill

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order. I have been watching the progress of the Bill with some interest. The Order Paper carries about 130 amendments. In a normal parliamentary day we deal with 10 such amendments. I have worked out that if we go on at this rate it will take us about 20 normal parliamentary days to deal with this Bill. Will you, Miss Boothroyd, ask the Leader of the House, either tonight or tomorrow, to bring in a timetable motion on this Bill and announce it tomorrow so that we may start it on Wednesday when we are supposed to discuss this Bill again?

I want to avoid on Wednesday a repetition of tonight's obvious filibuster so that the Committee can make progress. I remind the Committee and you, Miss Boothroyd, that a Select Committee has already said there should be timetabling of all Bills. I may not go as far as that, but the time has come to limit the kind of nonsense we are seeing today on a Bill that is basically non-controversial.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to that point of order. It was made clear at the beginning of the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that the Opposition have no intention of filibustering or of attempting to talk out tomorrow's business. Tomorrow is an Opposition Supply day.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir. K. Lewis) has hardly been in his place during the debate. If he had been, he would know that the issues have been debated quite succinctly without any closure motion having to be moved, and that the progress we are making is the kind of progress that one would normally make in Committee. The hon. Gentleman has merely drawn attention to the fact that the Government who accuse the Opposition of not scrutinishing legislation and who do not notice illegalities in their legislation have not provided enough time to debate this serious and complicated Bill.

The Temporary Chairman (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I shall respond to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir. K. Lewis). He will understand that I am not as expert as he is in mathematics. Therefore, I have not calculated how long it may take to get through these amendments. My job is to deal not with the timetabling of the Bill but with the proceedings. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's points have been noted in the correct place.

Mr. Hancock: I am sure that the Minister is grateful for the point of order raised by his colleague the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir. K. Lewis). Contributions from the Government Benches in support of the Minister's stance have been sadly lacking. A contribution, even in the form of a point of order by a Conservative Member, is to be welcomed by the Minister. The hon. Gentleman can now leave the Chamber with some grace, knowing that the Conservative party has done its bit by the Minister this evening in raising the point of order.

If the Minister does not think that the auditors are doing a proper job now, how will he define proper practice with regard to the future auditing of local government expenditure? The introduction to the report of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy refers to the background papers of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. It states:

"The Secretary of State is empowered to make regulations which 'make provision with respect to the keeping, form, preparation and certification of accounts and statements of accounts, and the publication of information relating to accounts and to the publication of statements of account'."

What more could possibly be needed that is not covered already? What wider definition of the role of local government and its responsibility and accountability with regard to relating its finances to the wider populace, its electorate, the Government or whatever is needed than

[Mr. Hancock]

those words that are already in an Act and to which local government must respond? Does the Minister suggest that those powers are not draconian enough for his benefit, or is there something else about which we still do not know that the Government want to do?

That matter draws me back to what was said by an hon. Member earlier about the role of the local authority member. Is this a back-door way of finally eroding what is left of public accountability in the role of the local councillor? In the end, will this role be slashed away by various pieces of legislation — this being yet another example of it — in that we shall have appointed commissioners rather than councillors to run local authorities? If we adopt what is contained in the Bill, particularly in these clauses, we shall go down a dangerous path. We now ask the impossible of local authorities. I do not know what the Minister is trying to achieve, but, from my past and present experience in local government, I know the difficult task that we now have in trying to put across to our electorates the reasons for matters such as rate capping.

It was impossible for the city council in Portsmouth to get an answer about why it was rate capped and what it did wrong. If it was impossible for that council to get an answer, how on earth will it be possible in future for local councillors to know what the Government are thinking in terms of the financial constraints that the Bill will place on them? How on earth do we expect the people who foot the bill, either as taxpayers or ratepayers, to understand what is happening in local government and in finance?

This is a difficult matter. It is being clouded even more by a complete waste of time and energy directed towards achieving little. At the end of the day, we do not know — the Minister has not told us and the Secretary of State did not tell us when he introduced the Second Reading debate—what the Government hope to achieve. We were told that the thrust of the Bill is to rectify past mistakes. The Bill now appears to be more concerned with turning the screw for the future as opposed to redressing what happened in the past. That is something about which we should all be wary.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding intervened to defend the Government on the Bill and to criticise the length of time that it might take. It is important that, at the end of the day, we all remember that local government is important. It means a lot to people. Local councillors have an even more almighty task because of the distressing matters that have occurred over the past seven years. Their job is being made increasingly more difficult by the sort of interference that this and other Bills have forced upon them. I hope that the House will reject the Government's local government finance policies. The way to do that would be wholeheartedly to support the amendments.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I support these excellent amendments. The Bill would be much better if they were passed. A consistent thread has run through this Government's policies for the last six or seven years. It is to make the poor poorer and the rich richer. Unemployment has increased from 1 million to 4 million; houses have not been built, resulting in the worst housing programme since the 1920s; there have been social security cuts; the National Health Service is unable to provide the services that everyone who works in it would like it to provide.

Local authorities are not completely run by Conservative party members. Therein the Government saw opposition. Therefore, they have introduced various local government Acts. I do not know how many local government Bills they have introduced, but there has been at least one every year and in some years there have been two. They have been introduced because the Government do not like what some local authorities do. With their large majority, therefore, the Government have introduced Bills to try to stop what they do.

This Bill is the latest example of what the Government are trying to do. They are trying to bring local authorities to heel in such a way that their accounts will be transparent to the Government, who will then be able to say how the accounts should be organised and which sums ought to be put into the various local authority accounts.

The Government are not introducing this Bill because they have at heart the general welfare of the people. They have introduced the Bill because they want to cut the income tax of those who are already employed. They have already cut income tax from 83p to 60p in the pound. Recently there has been talk of the Government cutting income tax even further. They have also cut unearned income tax. The philosophy is that more should be given to those who are already rich and well-heeled but that those who are not rich and well-heeled should suffer.

This Government and their supporters are well-heeled. They do not understand what many electors, including those who live in Lambeth, have to undergo. The Minister referred to Lambeth about 20 minutes ago and said that Lambeth's expenditure is 33 per cent. above the grant-related expenditure assessment. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) dealt with that point. He told the Minister that the electors of Lambeth have particular problems that the local authority is trying to overcome.

If the Bill is not amended, it will increase the problems that electors have to face. Administration will be increased; yet again local authorities will have to put their accounts in a different form. Clause 1(1) deals with rate fund revenue accounts. They will have to be kept in a particular way. The Minister will be able to say what should be and what should not be included in them. Clause 2(4) says:

> "The Secretary of State may specify in respect of any year kinds of expenditure or income which are to be regarded as of a revenue nature for the purpose of debiting or crediting items of account to a rate fund revenue account."

The Government are taking almost complete powers over the presentation of these types of accounts. The only accounts that will not be included in the general rate fund revenue accounts are those that are listed in schedule 1. If the Bill is passed, local authorities will be unable to do other than bow to Ministers' wishes. The Minister likes to blame councils for many of the country's ills, when that is not true. Nobody is perfect, and I would not support every action by every local authority in the land. I disagree with many actions of parsimonious and mean-minded Tory local councils. However, if they are elected as Tory councils I respect their right to do as their electors wish. It is up to the electors to change the complexion of that council when the time comes to vote.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Will the hon. Member explain why it is that his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) talks about a future Labour Government insisting on local authorities spending according to priorities determined nationally by a Labour Government? What is the difference?

10.15 pm

Dr. Marek: I did not hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, but no doubt he was talking about minimum standards. Old-age pensioners——

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. Patrick Cormack): The hon. Gentleman is straying off the point.

Dr. Marek: I was slightly led astray by a mischievous intervention.

There is a difference between minimum standards designed to ensure that people do receive services and what I have been talking about.

The Government make many mistakes. I wonder how many millions of pounds they wasted on Nimrod. Hon. Members might think about Nimrod and AWACS and the many hundreds of millions of pounds that have been spent on that.

What annoys me most is the way in which the Minister introduced this amendment. He said that this Bill is a result—this is the impression that he wanted to make—of the Government being weak in accepting the local authorities' suggested changes some years ago. The Minister said that it was not the Government who defined relevant expenditure and that the definition was suggested by local authorities. Whatever the Government do, it is never their fault. Where does the buck stop? Does it stop at the local authorities? The Government cannot blame it on the local authorities. The Government could blame it on their advisers sitting in the Box over there. Why do the Government not do that? I understand that there are protocols to stop the Government from doing that, but the Government could have done that, because they are the executive in the country and are responsible for legislation. It is because the Government are responsible for legislation that we have the Bill before us. The Government made a mess of it. Time and time again the Government will not admit that they have made a mistake, it does not matter what is under discussion. I can give examples from different spheres — the cause of the Falklands conflict—but I will not dwell on that because I would be ruled out of order by you, Mr. Cormack. The Government do not say that they are to blame for any of these matters.

We have a nasty lie being told by the Government to the effect that this was nothing to do with them, it was the local authorities saying that relevant expenditure had to be defined in this way, and because of that the Government have had all this trouble. It has been going on for three, four, five years and the Government have not found that the original definition was legally imperfect. This is an important point.

We are debating an amendment that seeks to improve the Bill in an important way by deleting clauses 3, 4 and 5. But lo and behold, the next group of amendments are Government amendments Nos. 6, 8 and 12. The Government are already seeking to amend a Bill which was published only a few weeks ago. Is that likely to inspire confidence among the public? The Government can calmly go on for three or four years before saying that what has happened has been illegal but that it is not their fault but that of those nasty local authorities.

The definition of proper practices has been mentioned. It does not look as though proper practices will appear in the Bill. That is the subject of the next group of amendments. I certainly have no confidence in the Government, given the way in which they are thrusting forth to the left and the right, trying to find some way of keeping local authorities to heel so that they can contain their expenditure so that the Government can continue to give money to the rich, which is what they have been doing for the past seven years. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) does not agree, he should intervene and I shall be glad to give way.

The amendment will improve the Bill. I hope that we shall be able to discuss Government amendment No. 76 and those grouped with it. I would, in common with my hon. Friends, like to understand what proper practices are. If those words are not now to appear in the Bill, will there be another amendment and shall we have a different definition? I would be interested to hear why the Government now think that their new definition will be watertight and transparent, and why it will not continually be challenged in the courts. I suspect that that will not happen and that the Government have got things all wrong and that is why I support the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Dr. Boyson: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 2, line 3, leave out from 'The' to 'and' in line 6 and insert: 'items of account debited to the rate fund revenue account of an authority shall include all items of defined revenue expenditure, and the items of account credited to the rate fund revenue account of an authority shall include all items of defined revenue income;'.

The Temporary Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 8 and 12.

Amendment No. 29, in page 2, line 36, at end add—

'( ) The following items of account shall be debited or credited to a rate fund revenue account, namely, items which are not items of expenditure or income but which in accordance with the proper practices to be observed in compiling accounts are to be debited or credited to the rate fund revenue account.'.

Amendment No. 188, in clause 13, page 9, line 40, at end add—

'*(f)* "expenditure" includes all expenditure which is payable by a local authority to another person, but does not include any financial transfer between funds kept by a local authority.

(g) "income" includes all income which is payable to a local authority by another person, but does not include any financial transfer between funds kept by a local authority.'.

Dr. Boyson: These amendments are designed to make it clear that, in addition to revenue expenditure and income, other items of account can be included in the rate fund revenue account when this conforms to proper practice.

The starting point is that the rate fund revenue account is identified as the account to which all revenue expenditure and income must be debited or credited, except revenue expenditure or income which is properly debited or credited to certain other accounts. The revenue expenditure and income to be excluded is not simply that which is properly debited or credited to any other account

[Dr. Boyson]

than the rate fund revenue account, since expenditure and income included in memorandum accounts—such as the account for section 137 expenditure — should also be included in the rate fund revenue account. Hence the main accounts, the expenditure and income of which are to be excluded from the rate fund revenue account, are specified in schedule 1. The power for my right hon. Friend to make specification under clause 1(6)*(b)* will enable us to cope with any other such accounts, including any such accounts established by local Acts.

In addition to revenue expenditure and income, other items of account can be included in the rate fund revenue account, such as contributions to special funds or special capital expenditure, where this conforms to proper accountancy practices.

Clause 2 provides that those practices are any practices drawn from the practices applicable to the traditional non-statutory rate fund revenue accounts in 1986-87, but taking into account variations in practice occurring from time to time. The new rate fund revenue accounts are those knitted into the traditional rate fund revenue accounts which authorities have generally kept in the past.

Amendments Nos. 6, 8 and 12 will make that clear and I commend them to the Committee. Amendments Nos. 29 and 188 would seem to be directed towards the same end, but they are defective in their purpose. Amendment Nos 29 introduces the concept of proper practices without initially anchoring the concept of the practices applicable to traditional rate fund revenue accounts in 1986-87.

Amendment No. 188 would require all the authorities to complete their accounts exclusively on the accruals basis, which I understand is not the case at the moment. I agree that this would be desirable, but it is not the intention in the Bill to regulate the way in which local authorities keep their accounts; hon. Members spoke about this in a previous debate. It is not the wish of the Government to tie down the way in which local authorities keep their accounts more than is necessary to keep it within the definitions that we need on both net and total expenditure, and other definitions that have been mentioned tonight.

Accordingly, I recommend the Committee to reject amendments Nos. 29 and 188 and to accept amendments Nos. 6, 8 and 12.

Mr. John Fraser: If I were suffering from insomnia and I had to choose between Horlicks and the Minister's speech, I would choose the Minister's speech. It dealt with some of the ground over which we went in the previous debate. I shall not take those matters further. However, I wish to draw attention to our amendment No. 29, which says that, if an item is not traditionally an item of income or expenditure, but, according to the proper practices that are observed in the accountancy profession, is, as a matter of proper practice, debited or credited to the rate revenue account, it should continue so to be debited or credited.

There is a conflict in the Bill between that which is a proper practice and that which is defined as an income or expenditure. The Minister mentioned a number of local funds, set up perhaps by local legislation or otherwise. There may be certain capital accruals to the income of the local authority. It is certainly the case that the City of London has a number of private funds — in fact, so many that clause 1 has special provisions for it. There may be smaller endowment type funds available to local authorities or other forms of money traditionally paid into the rate revenue account. Amendment No. 29 says that, if that is defined as a proper practice, it should continue to be observed, as local authorities should not be penalised thereby.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I shall raise with the Minister a point raised in the previous debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) which is relevant to this debate as well.

The Government are not content to rely on the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Under section 23 of that Act, the Secretary of State is empowered to make provision with respect to

"the keeping . . . form, preparation and certification of accounts".

If the Minister is prepared to accept the good will of the local authority associations and the chartered institute, which, in agreement with the Government, are working on a code of practice for local authority accounting that will have to pass the test of section 22, why is he introducing separate wording? Presumably the Government are trying to catch those who they do not like who are trying to shift around money in an attempt to defeat the Government's purpose of controlling local government expenditure.

The Second Reading debate has finished, and we are now debating the Bill line by line. The various provisions of the code of practice under consideration seem to me as a lay person with 15 years' experience of local government to cover all the points that the Minister is trying to put through in the Bill. The Committee deserve a response showing why it is thought that the section 23 provision is not satisfactory when local authorities are working to put together an enforceable code of practice.

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply briefly to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). This Bill is before the House because the definitions which we presumed were the definitions intended under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 had been found to be defective. That is why we have to be so careful of the wording here. I have already said that there is no intention to define more than necessary how local authorities keep their accounts. Indeed, I shall resist later certain amendments which would constrain local authorities further in the way in which they keep their accounts.

Amendment agreed to.

10.30 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page, 2 line 6, leave out from 'authority' to end of line 7.

The Temporary Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments:

No. 9, in page 2, line 12, leave out
'an account mentioned in subsection (6) below'
and insert
'another account kept by that authority'.

No. 10, in page 2, line 14, after 'to', insert 'such'.

No. 11, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'so mentioned'.

No. 13, in page 2, line 19, leave out
'an account mentioned in subsection (b) below',
and insert
'another account kept by that authority'.

No. 14, in page 2, line 21, after 'to', insert 'such'.

No. 15, in page 2, line 21, leave out 'so mentioned'.

No. 16, in page 2, line 22, leave out subsection (6).

No. 30, in page 11, line 2, leave out Schedule 1.

No. 31, in clause 2, page 2, line 46, leave out from 'income' to end of line 47.

No. 32, in clause 2, page 3, line 3, leave out from 'year' to end of line 5.

No. 149, in clause 9, page 7, line 29, leave out '1(6)'.

Mr. Roberts: I shall refer to amendments 7 and 9 specifically. On Second Reading my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said:

"Clause 2 talks of 'proper practices' in connection with local government rate fund revenue account matters, but offers no definition of them. In finance law, auditors are already under a duty to ensure that councils use proper practices in their accounts. The new proposals need detailed explanation and examination of their effects on the rate support grant system."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. *50*.]

Those amendments would do away with the need for the concept of so-called proper practices in that sense and require the Secretary of State to explain what is meant by proper practices, because he has not yet responded to the request made on Second Reading by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland.

If we look behind the amendments, and behind the purpose of the legislation we see why this concept of so-called proper practices is being enshrined in legislation. I served on the Standing Committee that considered the 1980 Bill which became the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. That Act was improperly framed and interpreted, and that has led to all this trouble. At that time, Ministers took decisions for political purposes, which have meant that during the past six or seven years they have been implementing their own legislation illegally. In fact, it was the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley), the then Minister for Housing, who, for political purposes—because the Government had just introduced an Act encouraging local authorities to make profits on housing revenue accounts out of council tenants—was quite happy to encourage local authorities to put up rents and to make profits and use them to subsidise the ratepayers and reduce the need for central Government grant.

It was as a result of that political desire, not from any representations by Labour local authorities, that the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling took the decision that any surpluses, in the housing revenue account or others—could be used as expenditure and, unlike the rate fund account, could not be treated for purposes of block grant settlements as money that was to attract penalties or clawback. That was the real position. The right hon. Member—the then Minister for Housing—made housing starts an official secret and then went off to the Ministry of Defence. He was followed by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), whom we heard earlier pleading how important the Bill was. He was another guilty Minister in the Department of the Environment who carried out the legislation in an illegal manner. He was a lawyer, yet he blames us for not realising that the legislation was illegal. All the time it was in the Government's interest to work the system in that way. That is what the Bill is all about—to allow local authorities to make profits on certain trading and other accounts, and to use that money oustide the rate fund account and without it being considered for the purposes of block grant and rate support grant penalties.

The Government found that that practice was illegal and they want to rectify the position and retrospectively validate the money that they have given to local authorities outside the block grant. However, they now also want local authorities to follow a different procedure in running their trading and other accounts and adopt a new concept of so-called proper practices.

These amendments would remove that requirement and restore to local authorities their current discretion about items that count as expenditure and income for block grant purposes. The so-called proper practices concept is another attempt by the Government to enshrine in legislation more central Government control and restrictions over local government resources. The amendments would, quite blatantly, return to local authorities the freedom that they have always enjoyed, even under this Government, to raise revenue through the housing revenue and other accounts and not be penalised for so doing through central Government grant. If the Government would accept our amendments, many of the problems that they and local government face would be removed.

Amendment No. 9 refers to schedule 1, which lists all the different accounts that are administered by local authorities. However, the Government have also included a provision for the Secretary of State to determine any other sort of account that might not be listed in the schedule. That shows that central Government cannot control local government expenditure and examine all the details of it. Having listed 13 different accounts, separate from the rate fund account, that local authorities can administer and control, the Bill then has a catch-all provision for any other account which the Secretary of State has forgotten and which is not, therefore, listed in the schedule. That shows how inadequate the Bill is.

Amendment No. 7 would remove the requirement for local authorities to observe the so-called proper practices in compiling accounts. Those practices are not defined in the Bill, although they are effectively linked in clause 2(3) to the procedure of debits and credits laid down by the Bill for the calculation of rate fund revenue. That will be subject to specification by the Secretary of State. Again, that is more power for the Minister and less for democratically elected local government.

There is a clear danger that accounting practices, hitherto almost exclusively a professional preserve, will be determined by the Secretary of State in a political and arbitrary manner, so that once again those local authorities that the Tory Minister does not like are penalised and others let off scot free. Tammany Hall would be operating from Whitehall rather than from the town hall.

There is widespread concern about the implications of these changes, not just among people in local government but among accountants and professional auditors in the private sector and public and district auditors who work with local government. Urgent clarification is required. Our amendments should be accepted and freedom given to local government. The law must be put right.

We must not go along the road of more central control and less local government freedom. Local government must have control of their resources so that it can spend what it raises locally on services for the people without being penalised by central Government through clawback and surcharges.

Local Government Finance Bill

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): It is ironic that an hon. Member representing Merseyside — the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) — should move a motion on proper accounting practices. I am sure that he is an expert on the financing practices of Liverpool, which seem to fall into line with many of the practices of some of the London boroughs immediately adjacent to the House of Commons. It is clear that proper accounting practices seem to have passed by most of those authorities. There are 5·8 million voters who live under these councils and it is our duty to protect them. That is why this clause and the others that follow it are necessary.

Mr. Meadowcroft *rose*——

Mr. Hind: No doubt, the hon. Member for Bootle had an opportunity to scrutinise the leaked report by the Audit Commission which was published last Sunday in the *Sunday Telegraph*. The report considers the problems of Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark and says that they are all cases for concern. The report states:

"The symptoms of poor management are clear: housing in poor condition, failure to act on opportunities to reduce waste, difficulty recruiting and keeping staff and generally poor industrial relations.

The consequences are serious, with expenditure double that in similarly deprived areas even after allowing for the extra costs associated with employing people in London; poor services; a cash gap in prospect next year of £500 million—as much as 40 per cent. of current revenue expenditure in some places—and over £700 million of deferred purchase arrangements which will load on future generations of ratepayers the cost of some of today's management failures."

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough) *rose*——

Mr. Meadowcroft *rose*——

Mr. Hind: The hon. Member for Bootle seeks to give the Government advice on how local authorities should be run.

Hon. Members, especially Conservative Members, should bear in mind the report issued on 5 December this year which was headlined in *The London Standard* and said that London was going broke. It is going broke because Labour authorities throughout Britain are deferring payment on revenue in the hope, according to the leader of Islington council, that a Labour Government will bail them out.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Meadowcroft *rose*——

Mr. Hind: I give way to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft).

Mr. Meadowcroft: I would express no particular love or support for the accounting practices of the local authorities mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he will answer the questions that I always want to ask Conservative Members who make this point. If these abuses are so blatant, why are the hon. Gentleman and his Conservative friends in those authorities incapable of persuading the voters to throw out the councillors? Why do these 5 million people still live under the type of political control that the hon. Gentleman regards as so reprehensible? Why do the hon. Gentleman and his political colleagues have such an inferiority complex that they believe that it is impossible to get rid of those authorities, except by Government diktat? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the Sefton metropolitan district, from which the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) comes, the Conservative party lost control last May? It is a matter not only of dislinking the accounting elsewhere but of the Conservative party not being able to cope locally.

Mr. Hind: The Liberal party has the same trouble in dislodging the Labour party in those areas as we do.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Surely, the hon. Gentleman believes in democracy.

Mr. Hind: Of course, we believe in democracy. As I understand it, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) is saying that he deprecates the practices that are followed by those authorities.

Mr. Meadowcroft *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hind: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees. Is he saying that he has the same difficulty in dislodging Labour councillors? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would agree that by the use of the debating system in the House we shall at least have the opportunity to expose to a much wider audience the bad practices in those authorities.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Hind: If we sit back, do nothing about it and allow it to go on, it will be swept under the carpet by Opposition Front Bench spokesmen who have no control over the people in Labour-controlled local authorities. It is up to us to expose it. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is in the Chamber, went to Liverpool to try to persuade Liverpool council to modify its policies. He was sent back to Westminster with his tail between his legs. That does not bode well for the future if a Labour Government are ever allowed to take office. Those are the factors we have to bear in mind.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

10.45 pm

Mr. Hind: I have nearly finished. The hon. Gentleman can then say his piece.

In the light of the Auditor General's report and the other reports before us about the practices in the bad Left-wing Labour run authorities, how can anybody give Conservative Members a lecture on proper accounting practice?

Mr. Allan Roberts: I do not know which of the practices of Liverpool city council to which the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) objects. I do not know whether it is the policy of refusing to put up the rates or its policy of selling off assets so that it can get money for capital receipts. However, may I point out to the hon. Gentleman that I do not represent a Liverpool constituency. I represent Bootle, which is in Sefton. I am concerned about proper practices in local government. However, proper practice in terms of these amendments is about how local authorities organise their accounts, especially those without the rate fund revenue account.

I would be happy to examine the practices of Sefton council when it was Conservative controlled. In the same year as it closed a school for the physically handicapped, it used ratepayers' money to build a statue of Red Rum in Southport.

Mr. Flannery: In 1985 the controller of the Audit Commission spoke about Sheffield. He said:

"The city is well managed and other cities can learn from Sheffield which provides outstanding value for money."

Does my hon. Friend think that Sheffield will get any mercy from the Government, no matter how good it was or how good the Audit Commission thought it was?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is quite right. However, Sheffield Labour council is rewarded by the electors in Sheffield who continue to re-elect overwhelmingly a Labour council.

As I was saying, in the same year as the Sefton Tory council closed learner swimming pools it bought fairy lights for Lord street in Southport with ratepayers' money. In the same year as the school children were sharing text books in the schools the council refused to give discretionary grants to students who obtained places in colleges of further and higher education. Those discretionary grants were provided by every Labour controlled local authority in Merseyside. It was the lowest rated metropolitan district in the country with 30 per cent. unemployment levels. Did the low rates drive the jobs away as we are accused of driving them out of Liverpool and elsewhere.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roberts: No, I want to get back to the amendments. Let us have some sensible answers from the Minister. Will he tell us what proper accounting means? Why is it needed when district and other auditors cannot see the need and when there are already necessary checks and balances? Why have the Government got themselves into such a mess that they have to introduce this sort of legislation which takes more powers and rights away from local government and goes further by preventing it from using money it has raised through its own efforts. The Government are now taking control of how the rates are raised, what level they are raised to and how they are spent. In the legislation that we are trying to amend, the Government are taking control of the money raised by local authorities on every account that they run, from the housing revenue account to the money collected from the municipal laundries. Does not the Minister think that that is nonsense?

Mr. Hancock: Yet again we have come full circle to the words "proper practices". I hope that the Minister will now afford the House the pleasure of hearing his interpretation of the meaning of those words. The alliance will support the amendments and I hope that the "Labour" party will force a Division as these points are crucial to the essence of local democracy.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) referred to the problems that he envisaged would arise through the leaked report from the Audit Commission. He enthused about the ability of the House to talk a local authority out of existence. That was extreme folly. The only way in which local authorities should continue to be put out of power is through the ballot box. The Government's mistaken circus adventure involving the abolition of the metropolitan counties must never be repeated. The hon. Gentleman's "enthusiasm" for that form of local democracy—if that is the right word—is something that the Committee should oppose. I hope that this Conservative Government will learn that the mistake that they made previously by relieving people of a form of local government that they did not like, will ultimately cost more than the Government were hoping to save.

What is wrong with the present system? Why is it so bad that we have to go through this exercise? Time and again alliance Members have tried to get that message across and glean from the Minister what is wrong with local government finance. I am no supporter of the Labour party, but I know that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), would find it difficult to fault the way in which the Labour-controlled authority in Southampton has acted. The people in Southampton find very little to condemn. As a member of the county council, I have strained very hard to find fault with the Labour party line. Undoubtedly it has pushed its credibility to extremes on occasions, but its main financial thrust and the way in which it has controlled expenditure in Southampton is a lesson for us all.

I draw the Under-Secretary of State's attention to the position in Hampshire. He may smile, but would he care to come to the Dispatch Box and tell us about that council which, year in year out, followed the Government's rules to the letter but in which there was a 14 per cent. rate increase last year and in which there is predicted to be a 12 per cent. rise this year? Despite the best efforts of the Secretary of State to impose a form of local government on a Conservative-controlled local authority, he has failed miserably. The only way in which the people of Hampshire have benefited in the past 18 months is through the advent of a virtually balanced council. At least they have better services for the increased rates. However, for five or six years they suffered rate increases and received very little, if anything, in return.

The Minister must explain what "proper practices" means and tell us what practices he is so against which so mysteriously and at long last have warranted the Bill. What will the Minister abolish in schedule 1? What will he make it difficult for local authorities to achieve? Will he tell a local authority, which may have an enterprising activity such as a ferry port from which it may derive wide revenue and for which it may have put away money for development, that that reserve fund for future capital expenditure should not exist? Is he claiming that that money should go into the general rate fund and so erode the pressure to rekindle the enthusiasm for jobs in the dock areas or in the inner cities? Will that type of fund no longer be legal? We need to know, because many local authorities gain income from such activities which would no longer be able to go into so many useful things if the Bill were accepted.

The phrase "proper practices" can be defined in many ways, and I hope that the Minister will give us the benefit of his interpretation.

Dr. Boyson: I do not think that the two and a half sides of the Committee are as far apart here as some speeches have implied.

We all enjoyed listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who drew attention to the importance of the Audit Commission report, which we will all read carefully when it is published.

Clauses 1 and 2 and schedule 1 set up the rate fund revenue account. The aim is that rate fund revenue accounts should conform to the way in which authorities have generally kept their traditional, but non-statutory,

[Dr. Boyson]

rate fund revenue accounts. Our intention is not to change current practice but, as far as possible, to make the traditional methods more common so that they can be checked. The amendments have that intention as well.

Rate fund revenue accounts might, however, differ from the traditional way in which authorities have kept their main revenue accounts. The amendments would reduce authorities' freedom to keep accounts as they want. I do not believe that that is their intention, and it is not the Government's aim. I ask the Committee to reject the amendment, not because it increases authorities' freedom but because it restricts it. Clauses 1 and 2 and schedule 1 are, as far as possible, based on the best methods used by local authorities.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 167, Noes 219.

Division No. 66] **[10.57 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Shearman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Ancram, Michael
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Chope, Christopher
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*

Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 2, line 8, leave out 'The' and insert

'For the purposes of subsection (3) above defined revenue'.

No. 12, in page 2, line 15, leave out 'The' and insert

'For the purposes of subsection (3) above defined revenue'.—*[Dr. Boyson.]*

Mr. Allan Roberts: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 2, line 25, leave out paragraph *(b)*.

To some extent it relates to the debate on the previous amendments on which the Committee has just voted. The amendments that were not accepted—they were defeated in the Lobbies—would have removed the way in which the Government wish local authorities to calculate their proper expenditure. This amendment is even more necessary. It attempts to rectify the legislation. It is not a wrecking amendment, but one that will improve the legislation, and the Government should accept it in that spirit. However, the amendment draws attention to the fact that the Secretary of State is taking even more powers. Clause 1(6)*(b)* states:

"any other account specified in respect of the year concerned by the Secretary of State."

In other words, again referring to schedule 1, the Secretary of State lists in his legislation 13 accounts that local authorities keep, other than the rate fund account. Schedule 1 starts with the housing revenue account and it includes the housing repairs account. It refers to such accounts as

"a trading undertaking (whether the undertaking is owned by the authority concerned individually or as a member of a joint committee)."

It takes account of any trading that can take place not only by the local authority alone but as a member of a joint committee. Such matters as local authority-owned airports are covered. Paragraph 4 refers to

"Any account of any fund established under section 15(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964."

Paragraph 5 refers to anything done in regard to goods and services under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970. Paragraph 6 refers to

"Any account of any fund known as a superannuation fund and maintained under regulations made under section 7 of the Superannuation Act 1972."

All that is covered. Paragraph 7 refers to

"Any account of a loans fund established under paragraph 15 of Schedule 13 to the Local Government Act 1972."

It covers a range of accounts that local authorities keep. Paragraph 8 deals with

"Any account of any fund established under paragraph 16 of Schedule 13 to the Local Government Act 1972."

The paragraph covers many other accounts that local authorities keep. Paragraph 9 refers to lottery funds. Sefton council holds a lottery to raise money. From the proceeds of that lottery, the council is able to fund all types of worthwhile, mainly voluntary joint efforts. That will be controlled and proper accounts will have to be kept. Any money raised from a lottery will count against a local authority's expenditure of it. As with money raised from rates, the Government will count money for penalty or for claw-back. Any pound raised from a lottery fund will mean that the local authority could lose another £1 or £2 in rate support grant. That is iniquitous. Paragraph 10 relates to

"Any account kept by virtue of section 10(1)(i) of the 1980 Act (direct labour organisations)."

Any profits made by a direct labour organisation that are spent by a local authority can be clawed back by way of the grant claw back or penalties. Paragraph 11 relates to

"Any account kept by virtue of section 55(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (parking places).

Any money raised by virtue of a sensible policy to get revenue from parking will be subject to the penalties, the clawbacks and the block grant controls—the detailed controls of central Government interfering even with money raised in a parking account.

Schedule 1 also includes any account kept by virtue of section 3(4)*(a)*(i) of the Further Education Act 1985. The schedule is all-embracing. Finally, the schedule includes

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

"Any account of any fund known as a metropolitan debt administration fund and operated under any order made under section 66 of the Local Government Act 1985."

11.15 pm

I have gone through the list of accounts to demonstrate that the schedule is comprehensive. However, even after keeping proper accounts, money spent by local authorities will be controlled by the Government and treated as rate fund expenditure. They will apply penalties and clawback. Clause 1(6)*(b)* refers to

"any other account specified in respect of the year concerned by the Secretary of State."

If the Department of the Environment gets it wrong again and does not include every account, however small — perhaps the petty cash that teachers use to buy equipment that is not provided by the education authority because the rate support grant has been slashed — the authority could be designated by the Secretary of State. He will be able to ensure in the minutest detail that the revenue of local authorities is controlled by him and central Government. Big brother knows best. No local authority resources will be allowed to escape the net.

This Government have encouraged profit-making on the housing revenue account. They have raised money through increasing council house rents. Under the 1980 Act the Government introduced a system whereby the Secretary of State designated the contribution to the housing revenue account by means of rent levels. Since 1980, rent increases have been determined by the Secretary of State. If a Labour-controlled council did not increase its council house rents by the amount determined by the Secretary of State or by the Department of the Environment's computer, the Secretary of State deemed that rents had been increased by that amount and reduced accordingly the housing revenue account subsidy. The system was designed to encourage housing revenue account surpluses which could be used to subsidise the rate fund account.

The housing revenue account surpluses have been used by many authorities. For example, Sefton was under Tory control until May 1986, when they were thrown out. Until then they increased rents to such an extent that they had a housing revenue account surplus of £2 million. In previous years that money was used to subsidise the rate fund. This year, with the Liberals supporting the larger Labour group on Sefton council, it will be used for the benefit of council tenants. It is their money. At last some repairs may be done, now that the Tories are not controlling that council. Money has been taken away from council tenants and used to subsidise the rate fund, but under the Bill it will also be used to calculate block grant. Whereas previously, in conjunction with local authorities after representations from the Tory local authority associations, it was excluded from the calculations, and every pound that was spent from a surplus on the housing revenue account did not attract penalties, it will now attract them. That is the intent and the purpose, all because the Government claim that these trading accounts, these revenue accounts which are not rate fund accounts, have been used by local authorities "to avoid penalties." All the local authorities have been doing is using the money that they have made locally for the purposes that they thought fit to benefit their electors and the citizens who live in their areas.

The Department of the Environment and the combined brains of Ministers have come up with this catch-all list in schedule 1. It is not unreasonable for us not to give the Secretary of State power to specify anything else in respect of the year concerned. If the Bill becomes an Act and that schedule applies without the provision that we are trying to take out by our amendment, at least local authorities will know where they stand. They will not have an account with moneys coming in from capital receipts or from a residual body that they think, because of the way that the schedule is written, can be used without attracting penalty, and then halfway through the year somebody—perhaps a councillor of an opposition party — telephones the Secretary of State and says "Do you know that they have this account? They have made some money in this way and are spending it for the benefit of the ratepayers or citizens of their area, but we think it should attract grant. Designate it; specify it in this specific year." That is an intolerable situation of the kind that the Government continually put local government into.

The Department of the Environment says that the purpose of clause 1(6)*(b)* is to allow the Secretary of State to add any account that may have escaped his attention because it is found in local legislation, but there are byelaws that allow for it. If that is so, this paragraph is drafted too widely, and before Parliament approves such a power the Secretary of State should give examples of what he has in mind. We could put another amendment down, and perhaps the Minister would on Report table an amendment that applies to a specific authority because of a local byelaw which affects them. That might be an improvement, because local authorities could look at the local Acts and would know what accounts were involved. That would be fairer than this, but why it is necessary we do not know.

We have now reached a parlous situation where there is detailed legislation to take control of the day-to-day running of administration of local authority accounts. When that is necessary, it shows the state that the Government have got into with this legislation, and it proves that it is impossible for the Government, Whitehall or computers run by the Department of the Environment civil servants to know more about a local community, its needs, revenue and affairs than the councillors elected by the local people.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the wording of the clause encompass any new account that the Minister might devise, name or list, which is peculiar to one authority, or does it have to be one that is common to all authorities in a particular category? The clause, as drafted, is ambiguous and could apply to one authority. We may then have the problems outlined by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), and a local authority may be singled out by the Government because they dislike how the authority runs its accounts, and may try to find one aspect to delineate.

If that is the case, the Government's problem is twofold. First, if the clause specifies a particular council, that puts the Bill in difficulty with regard to hybridity. It would single out one authority from another. On the other hand, if the Government wished to catch a particular local authority of whose practices they did not approve by trying to set up a particular type of account, it would probably be impossible to find a form which would cover all the different ones.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the different accounts listed in the schedule. But there are other kinds of accounts which at present, legitimately and openly, local authorities keep. Let me give one example. In 1969 or 1970 the Leeds council took over the theatre. For tax purposes, and because of the way in which it wanted to run the theatre, the council established the Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera Co. Ltd. All the directors are appointed by the council, but nevertheless it is a separate corporate entity and as such it has separate accounting procedures. As far as I can see, that instance is not covered in the schedule. At present, there are no difficulties and because the theatre, like virtually every theatre, makes a loss, although not a huge loss, it is subsidised out of the rates and the rate fund shows that particular subsidy.

If there were such an entity, in the category of a separate body, but nevertheless in association with the council, the effect of what the Government are trying to do might well be to encourage secrecy. That is the ironic thing. Because a council might be worried about what might happen in the next year or the year after, it might seek to turn away from the open road of publishing all its accounts so that it could put money in its back pocket to put money back into the rate fund account in future years. Once the trust that has existed in local government for so many years is destroyed, the secrecy and problems with which the Government seek to deal are bred.

Clause 1(6)*(b)* is particularly dangerous in further damaging that kind of relationship. It sets aside the exercise now going on with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to try to work out a code of practice for accountants between all the local authority associations in conjunction with the Minister's officials which it would then be incumbent on all local authorities to follow. That is the better road down which to go, and so the amendment is worthy of support.

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I have not so far burdened the Committee with my views, but I want to take two minutes of the Committee's time. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft).

I have two objections to the clause. One is that it is sloppy. If the Government intend to take all accounts into consideration, why do not they say so? Why have a schedule to the Bill? Why not merely say in the clause that all accounts are subject to the Secretary of State? In effect, that is what clause 1(6)(b) does.

I speak as vice-president of the Association of County Councils, which is most concerned about this because it does not know which accounts will be affected. The Secretary of State can jump anywhere he likes on a particular account at any time he likes. Accountants and county and local authority treasurers will bear the Bill in mind. They are law-abiding citizens. They will try to operate within its terms. But suddenly the Secretary of State can, under subsection (6)(b), designate an account as one that must come to his attention. The treasurers, councillors and others involved will not be aware of that when they set up an account. The Government are creating confusion.

If the Government want to do this, they should say "all accounts", and do without schedule 1. Anything that local government does can come within the purview of the Minister, and he should have the guts to say that that is so. I disagree with it, but the Government are trying to create a schedule on particular accounts, and then saying that they can jump anywhere else that they like.

11.30 pm

The hon. Member for Leeds, West mentioned accounts in his city. In my constituency, another example springs to mind. We are instituting a chemical industry museum. We have a lot of money from the Government, for which we are grateful, and it is going into an industrial archaeological site. My authority would never believe that the account for that project would come under the provisions of the Bill, but the Secretary of State could say that it would, even though it is a charity, because he wants it to. This is a charity well supported by industry. It is the only museum of its type in western Europe, and it is run by the council. Why should this provision apply to such a project?

If the Government want a catch-all, they should have the guts to say so, and make the Bill apply to all accounts. If they do not mean that, they should not put local government in the position that they do not know what will happen to a particular account, as the Bill does.

Dr. Boyson: I am glad to respond to the debate, because we can put at rest the minds of those who have spoken. I know that both the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) have much experience in local government.

Dr. Cunningham: So does my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts).

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful for that intervention. The hon. member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) also has great experience.

The expenditure in the accounts specified will not be taken into account for block grant. The list is there to ensure that is will not be counted as relevant expenditure. It is to the advantage, not to the disadvantage, of local authorities that this schedule exists. I know that hon. Members did not wish to imply that the provisions of the schedule will mean that the profits of, for example, direct labour organisations, will lead to grant clawback. The point of specifying these accounts is to ensure that expenditure and income debited or credited to them is not included in the rate fund revenue account. If this expenditure and income were so excluded, the rate fund revenue account would differ from that traditionally held by authorities, and would not be maintaining the status quo. We want to retain the status quo and exclude the specified items from the block grant account related expenditure.

Mr. Allan Roberts: I understand that if the money that is collected in these accounts, whether they are in surplus or not, is spent within the account so that, for example, money within the housing revenue account is spent for housing revenue account purposes, it does not count for block grant penalties. If the money is transferred from the account to be spent on purposes that otherwise rate fund income would be spent on, would it then be counted in terms of block grant calculation?

Dr. Boyson: If the specified money is in the separate accounts, it is not part of the block grant, but if it is transferred and spent as block grant, another situation arises. If it were not established in this way, it would be to the disadvantage of the local authorities. For the

[Dr. Boyson]

advantage of local authorities, and to continue traditional practices, we have framed the clause and the schedule as they are. If we accepted the amendment, it would be to the serious disadvantage of local authorities.

Mr. Tony Banks: I wanted to wait until I heard the Minister to see whether I could better understand this part of the Bill. Amendment No. 18 seeks to remove subsection (6)(b). Although I appreciate that subsection (6)(a), referring to a schedule, gives a list of accounts, how can this protect local authorities? To give the Secretary of State the ability to specify any account in respect of any year cannot protect a local authority. I do not understand that argument.

That must mean that if the local authority came up with an account, or if another account was discovered of which the Department of the Environment was unaware, the Secretary of State could be advised by his civil servants to specify that account. How does that protect local authorities? It is simply another catch-all so that, if the Secretary of State or his advisers have missed something —it is a fair bet that they might have done, given the complexity of the legislation — the advisers can come along and say, "By the way, Minister, it appears that we have missed this account which the authority is using for this purpose. We are sure you do not agree with it and we think that you should specify it using the powers that you have in the Act."

Will the Minister explain how that can be to the benefit of a local authority desperately trying to protect its jobs and services? How will it do anything to add to the understanding of local government finance? How can it bring consistency to the advice that local councillors will be receiving from their officers? Whatever the legislation does, it is not specific in this respect. How will this part of subsection (6)(b) be to the advantage of a local authority?

Mr. Allan Roberts: I am glad to have the Minister's confirmation that any money from the housing revenue account, upwards or downwards, which is transferred to the rate fund account and is spent on services on which, otherwise, rate income would be spent, would qualify in terms of the block grant calculations and would be included in the calculations for penalties. Will Conservative Members vote for legislation that will discourage Tory local authorities from taking surpluses from housing revenue and other trading accounts and spending that money on services which, if not provided with that money, would either not be provided at all or would be provided through an increase in the rates? That is what the Minister has just said. He is introducing a disincentive for a Labour or Conservative local authority to make a profit on its housing revenue account and use the surplus for purposes for which otherwise the rate fund would have to pay. It seems that I was right. The Government have got themselves in a topsy-turvey world of legislation to try to control the day-to-day, detailed affairs of local government.

If the amendment is not accepted, my advice to Conservative as well as Labour local authorities is not to make surpluses on their housing revenue accounts. If they do, they should spend the money on their council tenants so that they will not be penalised. If they spend it on subsidising the rate fund, they will be penalised. I would like all councils to do the former, anyway.

Dr. Boyson: As I explained in the debate on an earlier group of amendments relating to clauses 1 and 2, the power of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make specifications under clause 1(6)(b) will enable us to deal with accounts other than those in schedule 1, expenditure on and income from which should not be included in rate fund revenue accounts. Expenditure in accounts which are specified in the schedule will not be taken into account for block grant because it will not be counted as relevant expenditure.

I must say how delightful it is to see the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) with a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. That makes us believe in the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of all men. What a glorious sight is the hon. Gentleman. That is the sort of scene from which a postcard could be made. Whether that postcard should count as relevant expenditure or come under a non-total——

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister has commendable eyesight. I am sure that I could not have seen that newspaper had it appeared on the Conservative Benches. I am reading a story on the front page of the *Sunday Telegraph*, which is nothing more than Tory party propaganda — as one would expect from the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Daily Telegraph*. I hope that we shall have a chance to refer to it later.

Dr. Boyson: I must not be diverted by the hon. Gentleman with his usual skill. However, one may be redeemed on one day of the week, and what holier day is there than Sunday? If there is redemption on Sunday, it could come on Monday and Tuesday. I shall bring my own *Daily Telegraph* in future and offer it to the hon. Gentleman, and all hon. Members may watch his progress as he slowly moves towards the Conservative Benches. Such conversions have happened in history, such as on the road to Damascus.

We have had a good debate on the amendment and I realise the honesty and concern of all hon. Members. I advise the House to reject the amendment because I do not believe that, if it were accepted, it would be to the advantage of local authorities.

Mr. Allan Roberts: In the light of the clear explanation that the Minister has given, I am happy that advice will go out from the Minister to Conservative and Labour councils not to spend surpluses or money raised from housing revenue and other accounts on the ratepayers, but to spend it for the purpose for which it was raised.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

To report Progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Dr. Boyson.]*

Committee report Progress; to sit again tomorrow.

PRIVATE BILL PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That, in accordance with the Resolution of 16th June, in the last Session of Parliament, a Select Committee of seven Members be appointed to join with a Committee to be appointed by the Lords to examine the process of enacting Private Legislation and to consider whether:

(a) there are any matters of a kind at present dealt with by Private Bill which could more appropriately be dealt with some other way, taking account of the interests both of Promoters and other affected parties;

(b) any changes are desirable in Private Bill procedure; and

(e) any amendments are desirable to the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936 and the procedure thereunder;

and to consider whether any amendments are desirable to the Statutory Orders (Special Procedure) Act 1945.

Ordered,

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records.

Ordered,

That three be the Quorum of the Committee.

Ordered,

That Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Terry Davis, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson, Mr. Albert McQuarrie, Mr. Roger Moate and Sir John Stradling Thomas be members of the Committee.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Speech Therapy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): May I first thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to raise, on the Adjournment of the House, the provision of speech therapy and the remuneration of speech therapists in the Greater Liverpool area.

My interest in the provision of services for people with special needs stems from the six years that I spent before coming to this House as a teacher of children with special needs. I also spent eight years as a member of Liverpool education authority—much of that time as a member of the personal services sub-committee. More recently I spent a fascinating afternoon at the Myrtle Street hospital where the Liverpool speech therapy department is based. The Minister, whom I welcome to the Dispatch Box tonight, will recall that the unit is situated in a hospital just a stone's throw from the building which once housed the Liverpool Institute for Girls, the school where she herself was educated.

During my visit to the speech therapy unit I met Sheila Wilson, Pauline Furness, Susan Rees and Margaret Bishop, four members of the Liverpool speech therapy team. I was immensely impressed by their work, dedication and commitment. I specifically suggested to them that they might write to the Minister and invite her back to Liverpool to see for herself the work that is undertaken there. Perhaps tonight she can give that undertaking. I am also glad to see the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in his place; he has entered the Chamber on cue. I know that he will be hoping to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, later in the debate to reinforce the arguments for improving speech therapy provision in Merseyside. Although he cannot be here tonight, I know that the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) also wishes to be associated with the arguments being put before the House.

Those arguments might best be summarised in the following way.

First, there is a national under-provision of speech therapy services. Those arguments are highlighted in the words of early-day motion 361 standing in the name of the hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) and now signed by over 50 Members from all parts of the House. It states:

"That this House is gravely concerned about the wholly inadequate level of provision of speech therapists for specifically speech and language impaired children and young people; notes that the resources of the service have failed to keep pace with the increasing demands of an estimated three million of the United Kingdom population; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to take urgent steps to ameliorate the situation."

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Although this Adjournment debate is specifically about Merseyside, the early-day motion refers to the national position. Is my hon. Friend aware that in Leeds people are being transported across the city, often in delicate circumstances, because of the shortage of speech therapists? Parents are anxious that their children are not transported great distances to receive the special attention that they deserve. Is that also the case in Merseyside?

Mr. Alton: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the overall provision for speech therapy throughout the

[Mr. Alton]

country. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East, who tabled the early-day motion, is now in his place.

Apart from the debate on under-provision, there is an argument whether speech therapy is a service provided by the Health Service or the education service. The case of the Oxfordshire parent who recently lost her bid to force the local education authority to provide the speech therapy that her son had been shown to need eloquently demonstrates that the Education Act 1981 is a toothless wonder. That Act offers pious statements and ambitious hopes rather than the services that special needs groups require. The special twist in that case was that the severely speech disordered nine-year-old in question was assessed as requiring therapy that could be provided only by the local health authority—but that statement was binding only on the education authority. It is a classic demarcation dispute, and without the powerful statutory rights that parents enjoy in countries such as the United States, it leaves the needy without any clearly defined rights or services.

Inadequate remuneration might be added to the list as the third argument that Merseyside speech therapists and others throughout the country would wish me to raise with the Minister tonight. Speech therapists are highly skilled and highly motivated, but poorly paid. A graduate entrant can expect to earn £6,096 a year. At the top of the speech therapy tree, a district speech therapist will not earn a great deal more than £13,000. A clinical therapist can work for 30 years, gaining a vast amount of experience, and still expect to earn only a little over £8,000. There is no serious career grade for clinical therapists, nor does the career structure of the profession reflect the degree of responsibility held by staff in their work.

The recent 6 per cent. pay rise was described in the editorial of *Therapy Weekly* as "simply an insult". A good illustration of the position of therapists is highlighted in an advertisement in this morning's *Guardian* for a senior administrative secretary at a salary of between £11,371 and £16,136 — more than double that which a graduate entrant to the speech therapy service could expect to earn.

Perhaps this is not the correct time and place to try to negotiate a pay increase for speech therapists—yet it is one of the chief reasons why morale in the profession is so low. Levels of pay are, of course, an obvious factor in speech therapy provision.

The wastage rate in the profession, as the Quirk report noted, is inordinately high. That is partly because there is a drain to other professions. As Mary Pletts, the co-ordinator of the speech sciences degree at the National Hospitals College of Speech Sciences, said in a recent letter to Ken Mack, a veteran campaigner:

"This year I have heard that one or two of our graduates from a couple of years back have left the profession because of lack of money, career structure etc.—having found that what they have learned on the course has made them highly marketable for other professions . . . Unless things really improve for us in the profession I fear this small trickle could become a steady stream."

The shortage of speech therapists and its effect on provision of the service can easily be illustrated by reference to figures from the Mersey health region. I hope that the Minister will seriously ponder these figures. Perhaps tonight she will be able to offer some advice to speech therapists in the Mersey region as to how they can cope with their increasingly burdensome work load. She may even be able to suggest ways in which recruitment can be improved.

In 1972, the Quirk report recommended that there should be six full-time speech therapists per 100,000 of the population. Speech therapists know that that is a serious under-estimate. The Under-Secretary of State and her predecessor admitted as much last year. Information pooled from throughout the United Kingdom shows that a ratio of 10 speech therapists per 100,000 is much closer to the mark. In 1972, Quirk also estimated that there were 325,000 communication-impaired people in the United Kingdom.

We know also from the report by Enderby and Philipp in 1976 that the figure is, at a conservative estimate, probably 2·3 million. It is estimated in one early-day motion to be some 3 million. The Enderby and Philipp report broke that down into 1·5 million people with noticeable speech and language difficulties and 800,000 people with severe communication disorders.

The average number of speech therapists per 100,000 of the population in the United Kingdom stands at 5·7 whole-time equivalents. The best ratios are in Scotland at 7:100,000, in Northern Ireland at 6·6:100,000, South East Thames at 6·6:100,000 and North West Thames at 6·4:100,000. The lowest ratios are in the following regions: Wessex at 4·4:100,000, Mersey at 4·7:100,000 and Yorkshire at 4·7:100,000. That is one league where Merseyside certainly comes bottom.

Within the health authorities that comprise the Mersey region, a similar picture emerges. Under-establishment in Liverpool—part of the Mersey region—is 45·6 per cent., in the Wirral — no doubt the hon. Member for Birkenhead will touch on that—60·4 per cent., Crewe 45·7 per cent., Chester 63·6 per cent., Halton 58·6 per cent., Macclesfield 56·4 per cent., St. Helens and Knowsley 34 per cent., Southport and Formby — the North Sefton area—59·3 per cent., South Sefton 60·6 per cent. and Warrington 55·6 per cent.

The South Sefton health authority has two speech therapist posts filled. Five have been vacant since April, and the position could worsen soon. One of the two speech therapists is to leave at the end of this year. The authority is trying to recruit, but to no avail. The post is not a very attractive prospect. There is a small establishment with poor career prospects. New therapists would have to work in complete isolation with an extremely high work load. New therapists would not have the opportunity to benefit from working with fellow professionals more experienced than themselves, nor would they have the time to keep up the academic side of their work. Surely the Minister can see the depressing effect that working in such circumstances would quickly have.

Merseyside speech therapists told me during my meeting with them how truly demoralised they feel about the way in which the Government have responded to their plight. They are simply not well-meaning elocutionists, dressed up in white coats. They are part of a highly qualified graduate profession that, sadly, has a status usually accorded a Cinderella.

I should not like to leave the House with the impression that all the pressure is coming from the therapists. Liverool alone needs another 40 therapists and could use 15 more tomorrow. The failure to provide these posts leaves parents and clients frustrated and angry. I know that they have been writing to the Secretary of State in

their hundreds. I shall quote briefly from three letters. I know some of the parents well. Some are constituents and others are people whose children I worked with when I worked with children who have special needs.

A parent from the Walton area said:

"I am a parent of a handicapped child who is three and a half years old. Since he's been coming for speech therapy, John has learnt to play and how to talk. He doesn't have temper tantrums now he can talk. We had to wait 5 months for an appointment. This was a long time. We were worried about John. It would have been more helpful if he could have been seen earlier."

A lady from Tue Brook said:

"I am the mother of a six year old child. Thanks to the expertise and dedication of our speech therapists my daughter was helped to develop from a sad, non-communicative introverted child to a happy, fluent and extremely chatty member of our family. Without their help this transformation could not have taken place. Their value must be appreciated financially or there will be no prospects for other such afflicted children."

I should also like to quote from a letter sent to the Secretary of State by someone in Childwall, who said:

"I waited 5 months for an appointment to see a speech therapist. I have been feeling helpless at not being able to communicate with my own son. After seeing a speech therapist it only took 6 months to have him talking correctly but 5 months were wasted at the beginning."

It is a brave person who would question the value of adequately providing for a service that can turn a sad, non-communicative, introverted child into a happy and confident youngster.

There is an urgent need to improve provision, remuneration and definition of clear lines of responsibility. There is a desperate need to boost morale and to produce more than the usual expressions of gratitude to speech therapists for the work that they do. The situation, as I have tried to demonstrate, is especially bad on Merseyside and I hope that tonight's debate will go a little way to convince the Government of the need to take urgent steps to improve matters.

11.57 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) for allowing me to participate in the debate. As it is the first time that I have faced the Minister across the Dispatch Box I should say how pleased I am to see her there. Like the Minister herself, I am one of her fans. I am slightly worried however, because one of the reasons why I am a fan is that I believe that she has the fight to control, as anyone can control, the Civil Service. Therefore, I am slightly alarmed that she has only one minder tonight. I hope that that is not a sign that the Civil Service thinks that it is getting on top of the Minister. The Opposition will judge how effectively she controls her Department by the way in which she responds to tonight's debate, not necessarily in what she says tonight but in the follow-up.

The case has been eloquently put by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill. He has made the case for the under-establishment of speech therapists. That is clearly linked to their low pay. We have a Government who say that it is wrong to strike, bully patients or rough up the public, and many of us, in normal circumstances, would agree with that. However, there is another part to that argument. If any of us put forward those views, we have a duty placed on us to ensure that those who do have a genuine grievance can have that grievance met in a civilised way. I do not believe that the Government are facing up to that issue. Under-establishment and low pay are particular grievances of speech therapists but there are general conclusions to be drawn from this case as to how we settle unfairnesses in pay in our society.

I want to bring a message from some of my constituents who have benefited from the speech therapists. I must confess if I had not been lobbied I would not have been as well briefed about their work as I am. They came to my surgery and quietly put forward their case. They asked me to visit their surgery when I was next at the Arrowe Park hospital. I made a special visit. My constituents said that the speech therapists give them a passport back to life. We want to know from the Minister whether that passport will be spread to many more of our constituents and whether it will be spread by mere nice sounding phrases from the Minister or whether she has some effective action up her sleeve that may annoy some people in the official Box and beyond.

11.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I first congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on his sucess in the ballot and on raising this important topic. I also thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for his kind remarks. I have always thought that the best comment made about the hon. Member for Birkenhead was that he is the only real Tory that the Labour party has ever had.

I had the privilege of learning about speech therapy some years ago when I was involved in the Health Service in Birmingham. I had the opportunity to spend a whole day with speech therapists in that city working in hospitals and the community. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Mossley Hill. The range of their work is astonishing. They work not only with child stammers and stutters, but with children with a range of psychological and physical disabilities. Their work with adults has grown dramatically in recent years—not only with adults suffering from strokes or head injuries following accidents, but also involving people with laryngectomies. Speech therapists perform miraculous work to enable people without voice boxes to speak again.

I must stress that health authorities have recognised the important and increasing role of speech therapists in helping patients of all ages and all kinds to overcome speech impairment. The result of that recognition is that speech therapy has expanded very quickly, at a greater average rate than the general average rate of increase in Health Service expenditure. I mean not merely to say that but to prove it.

Expenditure on the Health Service since 1974 has increased nearly threefold. Expenditure on speech therapy has increased nearly ninefold in that period. In 1974-75 £2·9 million was spent on speech therapy. The 1985-86 figure—already a year out of date—was £24·7 million. As a result, it is possible to understand that the expenditure on speech therapy has grown very quickly. The results are reflected in the number of speech therapists employed in the service. In 1973 there were 1,461 whole-time equivalent speech therapists employed in the Health Service in Great Britain. By 1979, that figure had risen to 1,870. By 1985, there were 2,790. The rate of growth between 1979 and 1985 was 49 per cent. That is a

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

tremendous hike in the number of people employed in the service. In England, the increase between 1979 and 1985 was even greater at 55 per cent.

Many of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and the hon. Member for Birkenhead have been taken on board by local authorities. I venture to suggest very gently that, whatever difficulties the service may be experiencing now, they must have been much worse when there were fewer speech therapists under the control of a Government of a different political colour.

The question has been raised as to whether speech therapy is education or health. As I have said, for some years speech therapists have been employed by the Health Service. The Wallace case has tested that to some extent, but I understand that that is up for appeal, so we may receive further information on that point. It is a long time since speech therapists were employed en masse in the education service. Given the increased importance of the adult therapy that they provide, it is appropriate that they should be in the Health Service. The bulk of patients and the greatest need will come from that area.

One of the problems that is often raised is why they are not treated in the same way as such professions as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and others. The reasons for that are historical. I understand that speech therapists have always felt that they were a separate profession and they were concerned about losing their independence. They have always claimed that they are capable of independent diagnosis and the delivery of treatment. Therefore, they do not have to take referrals from doctors. As a simple matter of fact, the vast majority of referrals come from a doctor or another therapist if the case is referred back to a doctor for medical advice. However, that is the view taken by the speech therapists. As a result, they excluded themselves from the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960, and therefore speech therapy is not a registered profession under that Act. Until 1982 however, they were included with the other professions in the professional and technical A Whitley council for pay purposes. In 1983, the pay review body for nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine was set up. Speech therapists were again invited to take part but again refused to do so. While most speech therapists said that they were not opposed to the principle of a review body, they did not want to be linked with the other professional groups with whom they felt that they had little in common.

That was the crucial decision. I understand that some speech therapists now regret it, but that is the situation as it stands. Representatives of speech therapists negotiate with the management side of the Scientific and Professional Staffs Council, which is an ad hoc arrangement, until the trade union side can agree on the formation of a new council.

In 1985, speech therapists made a formal claim for pay parity with other graduate professions, and eventually received the same percentage increase as other staff groups, but the management side agreed to examine jointly with the staff side the arguments which bore on the graduate element of their claim. That claim is, as hon. Members know, still under way.

There is one point about the comparison with graduate professions elsewhere. Speech therapy had for many years been a graduate entry profession, but not all speech therapists are graduates. For historical reasons, speech therapists work 33 hours a week, whereas pharmacists, for example work 39 hours a week and psychologists' hours are unconditional. These elements have to be taken into account in the discussions.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): How many hours a week do Ministers work?

Mrs. Currie: More than 33.

Mr. Field: Not all of them do.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that the figures that hon. Members have quoted for pay are accurate, but it is possible to go up to £15,000 a year and, at my estimation, there are only six people at the moment in the basic scale, which would probably give somebody less than £7,000. It remains true, however, that the largest single group of speech therapists are in the senior II grade which, at the moment, gives a salary with a minimum of £7,368 and a maximum of £8,676. I therefore do not dispute the sort of figures that are being offered.

As for Merseyside, I have taken the opportunity today to discuss some of these questions with the chairman of the regional health authority, Sir Don Wilson. I am sure that hon. Members will join me in sending our warm congratulations on the award of his much deserved knighthood in the new year honours list.

I think that hon. Members will agree that it has been the case for many years now that the level of service is a matter for individual health authorities, which must decide how to use their resources in a way which best serves the needs of their populations, That is what decentralisation is all about. Hon. Members are a little unfair in the way in which they use their figures because, whatever may be happening in a snapshot taken at the moment, recently Mersey has been doing rather better. The overall plans in the Mersey regional health authority, some of which have already been carried out, show very substantial improvements. The drift of the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill is accepted in Mersey. It simply cannot be done overnight. A substantial amount is already being done.

I have here figures of staff in post full-time equivalents between June 1985 and September 1986, which are the most recent figures. As a simple matter of fact, between those two points in time, the total number of speech therapists employed in Mersey went up from 96·3 whole-time equivalents to 101·7 whole-time equivalents. That is an increase of five and half whole-time bodies in 18 months, which is a substantial improvement and is against a planned establishment of 110·5. That gap of rather less than 9 per cent. would match almost any level of vacancies anywhere else in the service. It is certainly not the enormous gap that was being described.

In the Liverpool health authority, which covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, the number of speech therapists has risen from 16 to 18 in post, which is a rise of two whole-time equivalents. If we go through the figures for the other health authorities we find that, from June 1985 to September 1986, Chester, Crewe and Halton have stayed roughly the same, Macclesfield's staff in post has doubled, Warrington has increased, St. Helens and Knowsley has stayed roughly the same, Southport and Formby has also nearly doubled and Wirral is up. The only one that has shown a sharp drop is South Sefton.

It is worth remembering that the figures for South Sefton should be looked at jointly with Liverpool, as the latter provides speech therapy services for children at Fazackerly and Walton hospitals, which are the administrative responsibility of South Sefton. Two of those districts, Warrington and St. Helens, offer provisions for their populations that are substantially above the national average. Two — Crewe and Macclesfield—are very close to achieving that level of provision. South Sefton alone is well down on the level of provision and that is substantially for the reasons that I have mentioned. Only four out of the 11 districts showed vacancies in September 1986. That is not a bad record.

The chairman of the regional health authority has pointed out to me that, in March 1984, there were only 77 whole-time equivalent speech therapists in the region and now there are 110 funded and 102 in post. The numbers have risen from 77 to 102 in a matter of two and a half years and that is a remarkable increase. By 1994 the plan is for staff numbers to increase to 150. That is not only a remarkable achievement in terms of what the authority has already done, but shows that it has taken matters in hand.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and also for the reply that she is giving. Obviously she is satisfied with the arguments that she is putting forward and, at the risk of accusing her of some complacency, I ask whether she would be prepared to take me up on my earlier invitation to come up and explain the situation to the therapists?

Mrs. Currie: I am always interested to visit my home town, especially as the hon. Gentleman is my mother's Member of Parliament.

Mr. Alton: I am sure that she voted for me.

Mrs. Currie: I shall bear that invitation in mind.

I asked the chairman of the regional health authority exactly what the authority proposed to do to ensure that it continued recruiting at the same rate as it has done. I should be grateful if hon. Members would recognise what the authority has already done.

The authority is considering the introduction of a supply register, effectively a bank of speech therapists, to cover temporary absences, including maternity leave. In this profession, as in any profession that employs a substantially large number of young women, such leave is a problem.

The regional authority is considering supporting a number of training places at Manchester polytechnic through the sponsorship of degree level students. The districts already co-operate with the polytechnic in providing training placements for the training school's three-year ordinary and four-year honours degree courses in speech therapy.

Speech therapy is an item on the agenda at the district health authorities chairmen's meeting on 22 January. They meet regularly and I am sure that that item has nothing to do with this Adjournment debate. South Sefton, which is the authority with particular problems, is in active discussion with the regional health authority about how to overcome those problems. It is not satisfied that it has fully explored the possibilities through advertising and adopting a more flexible approach to posts. I am sure that those approaches will be valuable. I look forward to witnessing further improvements and I hope that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill will call another Adjournment debate in 1994 to congratulate the health authorities on what they have done.

We consider that speech therapists are most important. Their excellent work is well known and the results are spectacular. Pay is under consideration. The alarm raised about the Mersey regional health authority is a little bit exaggerated. It has done very well so far and if it is to achieve further growth it will need to be imaginative in its recruitment and training. We must all hope that discussions of those matters will come to a successful conclusion.

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Monday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 20 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Primary and Secondary Schools (Books)

1. **Mr. Terry Davis** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the purchasing of books in primary and secondary schools.

4. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the provision of resources for the purchasing of books in primary and secondary schools.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Dunn): The Government's plans for local authority current expenditure on education in 1987-88, published in last week's public expenditure White Paper, provide for local education authorities to increase spending on school books, so long as they budget sensibly.

Mr. Davis: Is the Minister aware that the situation in Birmingham is so bad that fifth year students at Hodge Hill school have complained to the school governors about the lack of textbooks? Although the Secretary of State is widely quoted in Birmingham as having promised £100 for every fourth year GCSE student for books, equipment and staff training, in reality the city has received less than £60 per student and the school has so far received less than £30 per student, of which one third has come from the city's own resources. Is that yet another example of the Secretary of State's assurances being shown to be bogus when put to the test?

Mr. Dunn: The points that the hon. Gentleman has raised are matters for the local educattion authority. Within our plans for next year we are allowing for about £100 million to be spent on non-teaching costs, including books and equipment, associated with GCSE. That includes the £10 million expenditure on books and equipment already announced by the Government, and will be supported through the education support grant.

Mr. Cunliffe: Is the Minister aware that the amount of money spent on textbooks and library books in the Wigan education authority is 17·2 per cent. down for the current financial year on the 1979 figure? Is he further aware that at one time the cost was £5·19 per pupil, but that it is now £4·30 per pupil? Is the Minister proud of that? Is it not a standing disgrace that, in real terms, the opportunity for our pupils to advance in secondary education has been reduced because of a lack of textbooks?

Mr. Dunn: I am proud of the fact that my hon hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able to secure additional expenditure of £2 billion for 1987-88 compared with this financial year. That represents a cash increase of 18·8 per cent. and should increase expenditure by local education authorities in several areas, including books and equipment.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: I recognise that all local education authorities would welcome additional funds for purchasing books. Can my hon. Friend confirm that some guidance will be given in the purchase of any sex education books, to ensure that no "go gay" policies, such as those in evidence in the boroughs of Brent, Haringey and Ealing, are encouraged, because parents are worried that their children may be corrupted by that sort of book?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend will know that we have equipped the parents and consumers of education with increased powers under our new legislation, some of which will take effect immediately, to enable them to put pressure on local education authorities and schools about the nature, type and choice of books for different syllabuses in schools.

Mr. Robert Atkins: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the quality of the funding that both he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have been able to secure for the education service and on recognising that this is very much a matter for the local education authorities. Does he appreciate, however, that there is considerable concern in Lancashire as expressed by the leader of the Conservative group on the county council and other parliamentary colleagues who wish to take up the matter with him, about the number of old schools not having minor works carried out because of a lack of resources?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend makes his point effectively and I look forward to receiving a deputation of Lancashire county councillors and Members of Parliament. These matters are for local education authorities and any statement must be judged against the background of the additional resources that we have secured for expenditure in the next financial year.

Mr. Foot: Does the Minister appreciate that publishers who produce the books and the Publishers Association, which is capable of working out the figures, conclude that there has been a savage real cut in the sums available for school books and that that is additional to the cuts in the number of books purchased for public libraries and universities? That adds up to a fearsome total. Does he think that the miserable measures that he has announced will put that barbarous policy into reverse?

Mr. Dunn: I have observed the trend on expenditure by individual local education authorities. Some have been successful in increasing expenditure on books, while others have not. Some authorities have been more successful in privatising non-educational services within the education system, which enables them to spend more on books and equipment.

Mr. Sackville: Is my hon. Friend aware of the wide discrepancy between local education authorities in their spending on GCSE new books? Is he further aware that Bolton has decided to invest a small amount of its funds, thereby attracting only a fraction of the central Government funding available, and that that is causing genuine anxiety among local head teachers?

Mr. Dunn: I am glad that my hon. Friend has chosen this opportunity to expose the actions of his local education authority. I dare say that that decision will be judged in any election that occurs in the near future.

City Technology Colleges

2. **Mrs Shields** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made towards the establishment of city technology colleges.

15. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he is making with the establishment of city technology colleges; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The Department is making good progress in discussions with prospective sponsors of the first city technology colleges.

Mrs. Shields: Given that the maintained sector is the responsibility of the Secretary of State and that the establishment of city technology colleges will involve great expenditure, will the right hon. Gentleman give assurances that other areas of education, such as primary and secondary schools, will not be financially penalised as a result?

Mr. Baker: I readily give that assurance. The money that will be made available to the CTCs is additional, as is made clear in the public expenditure White Paper. I remind the hon. Lady that the CTCs will improve parental choice. Therefore, I hope that the Liberal and Social Democratic parties will support them.

Mr. Freud: Does the Secretary of State have so little faith in the existing city comprehensive schools that he feels that the additional money being ploughed into the CTCs would not create centres of excellence if it were invested in the existing schools? Does he agree that it is divisive to ask local industry to fund a school which will remove the best teachers and pupils from the community?

Mr. Baker: First, I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is no longer the official spokesman on education for the Liberal party. I have enjoyed his contributions in that role. There was not much policy, but he made up for it with style. The hon. Gentleman's interpretation of how CTCs will work is wrong. In response to CTCs, we have received letters from a large number of former teachers saying that this is just the kind of institution that would tempt them back into the teaching profession.

Mr. Pawsey: May I urge my right hon. Friend to reject the entirely predictable comments from Opposition Members? Will he take on board the fact that the CTCs are widely welcomed by industry and will do much to bridge the gap which exists between education and industry, and that if they provide centres of excellence they are entirely to be commended?

Mr. Baker: There has been an overwhelming response to the CTCs from the public and from industrialists, which has been very encouraging. There is a clear recognition that the new proposals and ideas these days come from the Conservative party, and these have been very well received.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that in pursuing his general policy to create centres of excellence, of which the CTCs are a good example, he will also ensure that well-established and long-founded grammar schools are not be allowed to be swept away by the political views of Opposition parties?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend's question goes rather wider than the original question. However, I assure him that in the draft circular that I published in the middle of last year I made it clear that in any proposals coming before me for the reorganisation of secondary education I would want to be satisfied that schools of proven worth were not destroyed, as so many have been in the past 20 years.

Mr. Madden: How many sponsors have shown their willingness to fund the CTC in Bradford?

Mr. Baker: Support has been shown in specific cities and general areas. Some sponsors have said that they are prepared to consider funding colleges in Yorkshire—in Leeds and in Bradford. Those offers are being pursued at the moment. I have received a specific proposal from one company to pay for all the computer equipment for the CTCs in Leeds and Bradford.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my right hon. Friend not deplore what might be described as the "backwoodsman" approach of some local authorities—of which, sadly, my authority of Nottinghamshire is an example—in taking the view that the CTCs will be established only over their dead bodies?

Mr. Baker: Some local authorities have been very welcoming, and one has offered specific premises. Others, however, have been very unhelpful. I do not believe that those authorities are reflecting the interests of the pupils or students who live in their areas. I must thank my hon. Friend for the help that he is giving in Nottingham in that regard.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Secretary of State aware that the CTCs are yet another gimmick in the long history of gimmicks that litter his career? Does he accept that they will be damaging to existing educational provision? Is he further aware that they will not be regarded as progressive by any of the informed opinion in educational circles? Do not the CTCs actually have more to do with the Secretary of State's public relations campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party? I am reminded today of his previous incarnation as Minister for Information Technology, when he set up the information technology centres, half of which are now in danger of collapsing.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has drawn my attention to the information technology centres. He is correct to say that I set up that network, and they have provided excellent training for many young people. I am proud to have set that system going. The hon. Gentleman's attitude is negative and does not respond to the technological needs of education. I assure him that the colleges will go ahead.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

3. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government are determined to see a satisfactory pay structure for teachers within the

generous resources that we are prepared to make available. I am continuing to hold meetings with the teacher unions and local authorities.

Mr. Watts: In return for the extremely generous 25 per cent. pay increase on offer, will my right hon. Friend continue to insist on a salary structure that provides for proper career progression so that we can retain and recruit teachers of the high calibre required for the education of our children?

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. There are two elements in the proposals that I brought forward on 30 October. The amount of money involved is £600 million more, which allows an increase of 25 per cent. over 18 months. That is the most generous offer made to any group of public service workers. I must also emphasise the importance of a proper career structure with incentives and promotion posts, not only to recognise greater responsibility, but to recognise good classroom teaching. That is the essence of the proposals that I have put on the table. I very much regret that the unions have not moved to them in any significant or real way.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State not realise that by destroying the negotiating machinery through which free negotiation between the teachers' representatives and the Government could have taken place he is doing something that occurs only in areas of tyranny where there are no trade unions? Is it not a fact that the dispute will lapse only temporarily and will then continue, and that every union in this country is now looking closely at the situation because if the Secretary of State has his way unions will be no use at all except as advisory bodies to the Government?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman persists in deliberately misinterpreting the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill that is currently before the other place. The Government introduced that Bill because we recognised that the Burnham negotiating procedure had utterly broken down.

Mr. Flannery: The right hon. Gentleman broke it down.

Mr. Baker: No. With the greatest respect that is not the case. In July there was the Coventry agreement signed by five unions, then there was the Nottingham agreement signed by four unions and just after Christmas only two unions signed up. The problem of trying to deal with teachers' pay and conditions is that agreements have not stood up as agreements, and union support has not stood up as union support. There is a sad background of historic agreements that have turned out to be neither historic nor agreed. That is why the Government have had to act.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in any future machinery he will have talks with unions currently represented on Burnham as a matter of course? Will he confirm that there must be some room for compromise, if it is possible? Will he continue to talk towards that end, provided that the conditions that he has enunciated so clearly and rightly are met?

Mr. Baker: I re-emphasise what I have said before. My door is open. I have seen various unions. I am seeing the National Union of Teachers tomorrow and I am waiting for further proposals to come forward. My hon. Friend's first point about the representations of certain unions relates not only to teachers' unions but to further education unions. I can give him my assurance in both areas.

Mr. Ashdown: Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), does the right hon. Gentleman realise that for many teachers the issue of pay is now less important than the maintenance of their civil rights? Does he appreciate that no group of workers could countenance or submit to the removal of their rights to negotiate on pay and conditions, and that many of us regard his attempt to remove those rights as a civil liberties issue no less grave than the removal of trade union rights at GCHQ?

Mr. Baker: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position as spokesman for the Liberal party, and, I believe, for the Social Democratic party—I would not want to do him down. I made some inquiries as to whether the hon. Gentleman had ever spoken on education before, but I have not yet been able to turn up anything. Therefore, we could say that he approaches education with a mind that is open, if not blank.

We are not doing away with entrenched union rights. That is not the position. The unions will be free to make representations to the interim advisory committee. After the interim advisory committee has reported, I will be obliged to consult its members either individually or collectively, as I am with the local authority employers.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind that in matters of education which involve our children it is more important to talk about responsibilities than about rights, and bearing in mind also the importance of reaching a satisfactory solution to the pay dispute as soon as possible, with a good pay structure for our classroom teachers, does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the National Association of Head Teachers should choose this time, of all times, to start talking about extra money on the table for possible extra new responsibilities? Surely this is not the right moment for talk of that sort.

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is not the right time to bring that up, because in the pay structure that I recommended deputy heads and heads are quite rightly recognised as people bearing considerable responsibility. I have been glad of their support for my proposals.

Mr. Radice: By his complete rejection of the reasonable compromise put forward to him by employer leaders last week the Secretary of State has shown that, all along, he has been intent on imposing his own package, but can he assure parents that ministerial diktat will bring long-term peace to our classrooms?

Mr. Baker: Before Christmas, when I saw Councillor Pearman, I was led to believe that there would be a considerable shift in the employers' and unions' positions. I was glad to hear that. In the event, there was a microscopic shift, which Councillor Pearman confirmed to me only last week. I regret that very much. I thought that it would be a much more significant shift. For various reasons, Councillor Pearman decided not to make any significant change at all. I regret that. However, I have said that I am still willing to talk to him should he wish to speak again on this matter.

Mr. Radice: He offered the right hon. Gentleman a compromise.

Mr. Baker: He did, but the compromise was microscopic. It was so minor that there was no significant change at all. He recognised that it was so small that he did not want to put it forward.

Student Grants

5. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss the level of student financial support.

12. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met representatives of the National Union of Students on 30 September 1986, when we discussed a range of issues, including financial support for students. In addition, my officials met representatives of the National Union of Students on 21 November 1986 to discuss the subject.

Mr. Dubs: Would the Secretary of State care to comment on the recent report by the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, which concluded that there was appreciable hardship for many students and that there was an urgent need to increase the level of student awards? Does he agree that many students find life extremely difficult and financially hard and that there is an urgent need to implement the Select Committee's recommendations?

Mr. Baker: I recognise that there has been a cut in the real value of student awards of about 11 per cent. since the Government came to office. First, I set up the review of student support under the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). He is in America today, looking at various methods of student support. That will be taken into account. Secondly, the reduction in the real value of student grants has not prevented a record increase of 140,000 students since we have been in office.

Mr. Lloyd: The Secretary of State seems to ignore the fact that the Select Committee's report unanimously condemned the hardship caused to students by the Government. Surely the right hon. Gentleman should tell the House what he intends to do about that. In reality, we already have the introduction of student loans by stealth. There is a good chance that, in any case, that is what the Secretary of State wants for his election manifesto. If that is so, let him tell the House and the students today.

Mr. Baker: One of the matters that the review of student support will examine is the possibility of loans as top-ups to grants. I refer the hon. Gentleman to an article in *The Observer* last week, which stated:

"If grants were topped up with loans we could afford more students, and if repayments were to begin only when someone was earning the national minimum wage, no one need be deterred. While the present ramshackle structure remains in place we are blighting the prospects of a generation of young people and endangering the country's economic future."

Mr. Sims: Whatever my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decides should be the relative proportion paid towards student maintenance by the state and by parents in the coming academic year, will he ensure that the total figure accurately represents student costs? At the moment it does not do that, as a result of which some students receive the full parental contribution, but it is still insufficient to cover their expenditure.

Mr. Baker: I appreciate my hon. Friend's work on the Select Committee. In any change in the system of student support we must ensure that students from families who are less well off are not deterred from going into higher education. I look upon that as one of the major considerations.

Mr. Forman: When my right hon. Friend met the NUS representatives, did they give him any reliable estimate of the number of students who are already dependent on personal loans and overdrafts to help finance their time in higher education? Will my right hon. Friend bear that factor carefully in mind in considering any conclusions at the end of the Walden committee's investigations, because it seems to me that he would be wise to proceed cautiously in the direction of full-blooded loans?

Mr. Baker: I emphasise that the review of student support is examining loans as a possible top up. We start from the proposition that it would be better, if we could, to remove students from the social security system. In the early days of Beveridge it was never considered that students would be part of that whole system. A very careful review is required, and that is taking place.

It is exceedingly difficult to obtain figures of the number of students involved and the size of their overdrafts. I have seen various estimates and I do not give much credence to any of them. The NUS representatives did not tell me the cost of their full proposals. The NUS proposals would cost some £300 million more for straight student grant support, and if extended to all students another £1 billion. I do not know whether that has been accepted by the official Opposition.

Mr. Fatchett: Did the Secretary of State note the paragraph in the Select Committee's report which said that worries about insecurity of finance were undermining the academic work of various students? How does the right hon. Gentleman reconcile that possible drop in standards with his supposed commitment to higher standards?

Mr. Baker: There is no record that there has been a drop in standards in higher education. I have said to the House, and I say again, that there has been a tremendous increase in the number of first-class degrees awarded by polyechnics during the past five years. We can all—not just one party—be proud of that. I do not accept that there has been any drop in quality.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Scottish students believe that loans are the way forward? *[Interruption.]* I am president of the Scottish Conservative Students Association. Many Scottish students also recognise that they can earn money during the long holidays, and they receive substantial assistance with housing support.

Mr. Baker: I think that many students who have overdrafts may welcome a form of formal loans, the payment of which is deferred until they are earning at the average wage or above. That point has been put to me by many students in England and, I am glad to say, in Scotland.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, normally, the Government make an announcement about next year's student grant some time in November and that, on two or three occasions, he has kept putting off an announcement? Has this anything to do with the fact that the Government are not absolutely

certain whether there will be a June or an October election and are therefore not quite sure whether the student vote will be crucial in many marginal seats?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he cannot be waiting for his hon. Friend's inquiry into loans, because its recommendations cannot be implemented in time for this year's grant? Is it not therefore important that the right hon. Gentleman makes an early statement that he will increase student grants by more than the cost of living this year to make up some of the ground lost since the Government came into office in 1979?

Mr. Baker: Decisions on education policy, which I am making and will continue to make, must have a much larger time scale than the date of the next election. I hope to make an announcement shortly on the level of grants for the next academic year.

Mr. Ashdown: In view of the fact as the Secretary of State well knows, that the recommendations of the review of long-term support for students cannot be implemented until 1988-89 and that his officials admitted in evidence to the Select Committee that the maintenance level of the current mandatory award does not meet the full needs of students, will he undertake to correct this situation when considering the mandatory awards for the forthcoming academic year?

Mr. Baker: I replied to that point in answering the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I shall be making the statement on the level of student grants very shortly, probably at the beginning of next week.

Mr. Porter: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would appear to be common ground that there has been a reduction in the real value of student support in recent years? Although I appreciate that there must be careful consideration of the type of student support in the future, it seems to me—perhaps my right hon. Friend agrees—that it would be proper, pending the decision, to review and bring up to date the real value of students awards. Would it not be proper also for the electorate to have a decided view before the next election of what the Conservative party means by its support for students?

Mr. Baker: With regard to the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, I hope that the review of student support will be completed this year. I take his initial comments very much to heart and ask him to await my statement next week.

Schools (Toilet Facilities)

6. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the provision of toilet facilities in schools.

Mr. Dunn: The requirements for the provision of toilet facilities in maintained schools are set out in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. They prescribe the minimum number of toilet fittings according to the number of registered pupils. Separate toilet facilities are required for male and female staff. The duty of securing compliance with these regulations rests with the local education authorities.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that toilet facilities in many schools throughout the country are disgusting, inadequate and intolerable? Does he know that local education authorities, including that in Leicestershire, simply do not have the necessary funds to put this matter right? As a result, many schools in my constituency have toilet facilities which would not be tolerated if they were in other parts of the country. What steps does the Minister propose to take to provide the resources to remedy this inadequacy?

Mr. Dunn: I am indebted to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his interest in school lavatories. I should like to point out that the total net provision in our current capital spending plans for education is some 18 per cent. higher than it was in the plans for 1986-87. This reflects the increased spending power from capital receipts by which authorities may supplement their allocations. How local authorities choose to spend their capital resources is, as ever, a matter for them to decide.

Mr. Maclean: Does my hon. Friend agree that the lack of so-called adequate toilet facilities in some small rural schools is not of itself a good reason for accepting the closure of those schools, particularly when such schools have good academic standards and are otherwise catering very well for all the children, as they did for preceding generations?

Mr. Dunn: I have never recommended a school for closure because of a lack of toilet facilities, and I shall never do so.

Tertiary Education

7. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received from local education authorities wishing to introduce a tertiary level of education.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is currently considering four proposals under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 which involve the introduction of tertiary education.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Minister realise that all over the country there will be demands for tertiary education, which is a natural follow-on, indeed a national follow-on, from comprehensive education?—*[Interruption.]* For the benefit of those shouting, the Minister told me the other day, on the delegation, that the demand for tertiary education was begun by a group of Tories.

When Sheffield submitted a plan for the provision of tertiary education quite a long time ago why, if not for electoral reasons, was permission given for that provision in only five constituencies out of six and the sixth constituency — which was Tory controlled — was excluded? In heaven's name, why stop those children in the Hallam constituency from having the benefits of tertiary education?

Mr. Dunn: That is a wicked and unfair accusation. The schools in south-west Sheffield were excluded from the Secretary of State's approval of the proposals for the rest of Sheffield because that area contained a number of schools which had good and successful sixth forms and because there were substantial opposition to those proposals in the south-west area.

Dr. Hampson: Will my hon. Friend reassure parents in Leeds, where a dogmatic councillor has assumed the role of chief education officer, that he does not expect them to submit to a tertiary scheme universally applied across the

city and that there is worth in maintaining a mixed system which retains schools that have sixth forms of proven worth?

Mr. Dunn: Whatever comes out of the city of Leeds, I can assure my hon. Friend that the proposals will be considered fairly and squarely, and on their merits. In the light of the answer that I have just given in respect of the city of Sheffield, any school of proven worth must make the strongest representations to us under the law.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Will the Minister confirm that his Department approves of tertiary education in principle and that circulars have said that this form of education is one way of dealing with a very real problem, namely, the surplus of school places? In this respect, is it not disturbing that in the case of the borough of Harrow, which is Conservative controlled and had very good grammar schools, when the Prime Minister was Secretary of State for Education and Science schools of excellence were shut down without a murmur and turned into sixth form colleges and are now becoming tertiary colleges, yet in the city of Leeds, when the same scheme is put forward, people say that it is politically motivated? It means that we are not getting the right discussion of real problems. It is not right to dimish these.

Mr. Dunn: Proposals come to us under section 12 of the 1980 Act for a variety of reasons, including the elimination of surplus places. I assure the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) that when the proposals come to us each set is considered on their merits and in the context of the educational provision for the area that they serve.

Sir John Page: Is my hon. Friend aware that the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who was my most distinguished constituent at one time, is only emphasising the valuable point that decisions on matters such as these should be left to the properly elected local authority?

Mr. Dunn: I should like to point out that we on this side of the House are totally opposed to a commitment that would enforce tertiary provision on all local education authorities. How local education authorities make proposals, and why they make them, is a matter for them. We have a duty under the law to consider each set of proposals on their individual merits.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

8. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when next he intends to meet representatives of the teachers unions to discuss future negotiating procedures.

Mr. Baker: I am meeting representatives of the National Union of Teachers tomorrow. I am sure the issue of future negotiating procedures will be raised.

Mr. Hughes: In view of the difficulties in recent times, in his quieter moments does the Secretary of State really believe that to impose a solution and, in the process, to take away the negotiating rights of the trade unions, is the best way to secure peace in the classroom?

Mr. Baker: It has not been possible to secure, through negotiations, an agreed proposal. The proposal that came to me from Burnham was conditional upon my providing more money than I said the Government were prepared to make available and also upon a structure which the Government find unacceptable. A regrettable feature is that the whole of the Burnham procedure—a sort of joint negotiating committee without my being represented—has led to confusion and indecision. That cannot go on. We must resolve this dispute.

Mr. Galley: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the teaching unions has threatened to concentrate its campaign about future negotiating procedures on marginal Conservative seats such as mine? It has told me that I am on its hit list. Whatever disruption that union may cause, I assure my right hon. Friend that I shall not bow to such scurillous tactics. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will continue resolutely to put first the interests of children, parents and that responsible and professional majority of teachers who simply want to get on with their important job?

Mr. Baker: I do not know which union made that threat, but I am sure that if it fulfils it and carries out its threat it will succeed only in increasing my hon. Friend's majority.

Mr. Radice: Is the Secretary of State aware that the proposals put forward by the employers and teachers for new negotiating machinery meet all the Secretary of State's objections to the old Burnham committee? Therefore, will the Government allow the proposals to work by amending the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill in another place?

Mr. Baker: The proposal that has been put to me by the NAS, and now by the TUC, simply says that they would like a joint negotiating council. They do not say what my position should be in such a negotiating council, what representation I would have or whether I would have an initiating or a responsive role. I am still waiting for specific proposals. Some may still emerge.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Park** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Park: In 1987, will the Prime Minister begin to speak and act on behalf of the whole nation?

The Prime Minister: With the increased standard of living of the whole nation, including those on benefit, I believe that we speak and act on behalf of the whole nation.

Mr. Dickens: Has the Prime Minister read reports today of the American diplomat's husband who has allegedly sexually assaulted a young English girl and who was prevented from being prosecuted by diplomatic immunity? Does the Prime Minister consider that the Vienna convention is outdated, bearing in mind all the parking fees that are left unpaid, the driving offences that have gone unchallenged, the death of WPC Fletcher and today's sordid episode?

The Prime Minister: I read the report, and inquiries were made. An incident did take place involving the

husband of a member of a foreign embassy in late 1985. Contrary to press reports, the case was not one of rape or assault, but of indecent exposure. Fortunately, there was no physical injury. None the less, of course, this was a serious matter. We immediately asked the embassy to waive the immunity of the person concerned so that action could be taken against him. The embassy declined, but withdrew the person concerned the next day.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister join me, and I am sure Members on both sides of the House, in warmly welcoming the reports that BTR has called off its bid to take over Pilkington? However, is she aware that the case has highlighted the need for a radical revision of the Government's decision to confine references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to strict questions of competition? Does she agree that at a time of so many conglomerate takeover bids such narrow terms of reference cannot properly safeguard the wider industrial and technological interests of the nation?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman has noted, the market took its own decision much more quickly than would have happened had the matter been referred. With regard to the specific question that he mentioned, as he knows, there is a review under way. The issues need to be looked at carefully and thoroughly. The guidelines published by the then Secretary of State in 1984 were designed to meet companies' wishes for stability and predictability. It would be quite wrong to be panicked into ill-considered changes, and for some time further review has been under way.

Mr. Kinnock: That review was decided upon last June, which was very welcome, and the advice and subscriptions of comment closed at the end of July. Why has it taken so long for us to obtain a report at a time when the value of conglomerate bids has gone up from under £1 billion in 1979 to an annual rate of £9 billion now, so distorting the whole possibility of the future of so many productive and innovative industries in this country?

The Prime Minister: Some mergers go through and are of great benefit and lead to the very much better use of assets. Some are fought off by the market and some go through with the market. We must consider carefully why matters should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. If they cause a monopoly and reduce competition the matter is easy to decide, but the decisions must not be arbitrary. If we are to define new rules, we must be quite certain that they are such that the market can clearly understand them and they do not lead to arbitrary decisions.

Mr. Hind: Will my right hon. Friend join me and many of my hon. Friends in congratulating Pilkington's work force on producing a highly successful conglomerate in the north of England? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, despite many of the comments to the contrary, this is a model of industry in the north of England, which proves that in the north there is industry that is alive and well and prospering?

The Prime Minister: I have visited some of Pilkington's factories, and, as my hon. Friend says, I have been very impressed with the work that they do.

Q2. **Mr. Woodall** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Woodall: With regard to the north-south divide, which the Prime Minister seems to suggest does not exist, is she aware that, despite her reply to the previous question, unemployment in my constituency is over 30 per cent. and 5,500 people are signing the register, out of which 278 are young people under the age of 18 seeking their first job and are already beginning to think that they are on the scrap heap? What does the Prime Minister intend to do about the situation in my part of the world?

The Prime Minister: With regard to what the hon. Gentleman calls the north-south divide, the difference in income has not changed much since 1975 and travel and housing in particular cost more in the south. Employment has grown since 1983 in every region, save Wales. Unemployment in the past few months has been falling fastest in the north, north-west and Wales.

With regard to specific help for the north, since 1979 the north, including the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside, has received over £2 billion of regional assistance, compared with less than £200 million for the rest of England. As the hon. Gentleman knows, each year the rate support grant system redistributes about £1 billion in grant from London and the south-east to the north. As he will also be aware, the Manpower Services Commission money for youth training and community schemes goes far more to the north than to the south.

Q3. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hirst: Without in any way prejudging the outcome of the Department of Trade and Industry's investigation into Guinness, does my right hon. Friend welcome the resolute action taken by its new chairman Sir Norman Macfarlane? Does she agree that if the City and business are to command confidence nationally and internationally they require people like Sir Norman to enforce unimpeachable standards of probity and integrity?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. I agree with my hon. Friend and his comments about Sir Norman Macfarlane. As he knows, the City is very important to the economy of the whole of the United Kingdom. It in fact contributes to the economy net earnings from overseas of over £7 billion, which is as much as, if not more than, North sea oil at its peak. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is vital that probity and honesty be seen to be maintained and we are anxious that if there are cases to the contrary they should be rooted out, and so, indeed, is the City.

I point out that the Government have done more than any other Government to root out such cases. Insider dealing was made an offence in 1980, for the first time. There was a Companies Act—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: —and a Financial Services Act 1986. A fraud investigation group has been set up, and a Banking Bill and a Criminal Justice Bill are in progress. Some of the measures that we have taken are now being implemented, and still more are in the pipeline.

Mr. Steel: When will the Prime Minister tell the House her conclusions following last year's review of takeover

and merger policy? Will those conclusions include the need to consult employees, as well as shareholders, in what ought to constitute a wider definition of the public interest?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman heard what I said earlier. Guidelines were issued in 1984. A review is under way. He also heard me say that any fresh guidelines must be quite clear and specific. There must be no question of an arbitrary reference of these matters, because if there is we shall suffer and not get inward investment. My conclusions will be made known when they are ready.

Mr. Roger King: With labour costs falling and export opportunities rising, does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain is about to enter an era of unparalleled manufacturing output which will bring prosperity and jobs to all areas?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct. Manufacturing productivity has gone up very rapidly and it is therefore thought that labour costs are staying level. This gives us a tremendous opportunity further to increase the volume of exports. Manufacturing industry is doing very well and its export orders are almost at record levels. Good times are very much in prospect.

Mr. Evans: What words of comfort does the Prime Minister have for the Pilkington work force and the people of St. Helen's for having seen off BTR? Will the Department's review of merger policy ensure that Pilkington will not be in danger of being swallowed up by some other financial conglomerate in future?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, the companies concerned and the market decided the future. If we had followed the advice of the Opposition it would have taken months more to decide it; months more of uncertainty.

Mr. Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that her recent visit to the west midlands was extremely well received? Is she further aware that many of the stout-hearted people in that region are determined to play their part in Britain's industrial recovery and do not believe, like the Opposition, in a divided nation?

The Prime Minister: I am glad to see my hon. Friend back in his usual place and showing his customary vigour. I very much enjoyed the visit to Birmingham and the west midlands. I was well received and found the area confident. Immediately on my arrival I was presented with a copy of the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, which had a record number of situations vacant in 29 pages.

Q4. **Mr. Allen Adams** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Adams: I am sorry that the Prime Minister did not manage to hear the entire question I put to her several weeks ago about the power industry. This was entirely due to the noisy and unruly behaviour of Conservative Members. Is she aware that Babcock Power, one of our major builders of power stations, has announced that 26 per cent. of its work force throughout Britain is to be made redundant? Will she consider bringing forward orders for the power stations that Britain needs so that we can keep together a highly skilled and specialised work force?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's point. As he knows, the decisions will have to wait a little longer, until after the Sizewell report has been published, considered, debated in the House and decisions made upon it.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to reassure our farmers that she understands the plight that they face, and will she repudiate yesterday's policy announcement from the Opposition that they will introduce rating of agricultural land and buildings?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a vital point. He knows our policy towards the farming industry, which is vital to Britain's future. Although it has to make changes, we are trying to see that those changes are made at a rate which the industry can absorb. We totally and utterly condemn any suggestion that farming should be rated.

Q5. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: In view of the reply that the Prime Minister gave a few moments ago and her support for the one-nation policy, will she consider sending a task force of the appropriate Ministers to the north of England to find out what the situation is there, because I am sure that the Government are totally ignorant of the situation in that part of the country?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in trying to give any impression that the north of England is down and out, when many parts of it are very prosperous. The road systems are excellent; the buses are excellent and the hospitals are excellent. In many cases the airports are excellent, the railways are running, and when I was recently in Manchester, and previously in Newcastle and also in Scotland, I made the point that if one wants extra investment and jobs one boosts the advantages of a region, which are many.

Mr. Mallon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister said that, apart from Wales, there was job growth in every region.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Initially, I cannot see that there is any point of order. It must be a matter in which I can rule.

Mr. Mallon: It is a point of order, because the growth rate of unemployment in the north of Ireland was 9·8 per cent. and I would not like to be —

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall try to call the hon. Gentleman on another day. Statement by the Home Secretary.

Bombing (Court Cases)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on my review of the cases of the Birmingham pub bombings, the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings and Mrs. Anne Maguire and her co-defendents. Although there were, of course, connections between the Guildford bombings case and that of the Maguires, these were three separate cases, treated entirely spearately in the courts. It follows that I have considered each one separately. I apologise to the House for the length of the statement.

All 17 people concerned were found guilty of very serious offences by a jury following lengthy trials. The verdicts in each case were later upheld on appeal after further long hearings. In short, the question of guilt was in each case properly determined by due process of law.

A Home Secretary must consider very carefully in what circumstances if any he would be justified in interfering with a verdict reached by the courts. Over the years, all kinds of changes may come to alter the view which some people may take of a particular case. The enormity of the crime committed may cease to dominate the scene; those convicted may continue to protest their innocence; police procedures may be improved; new scientific tests may be developed; individuals may write books or produce television programmes which summarise days or weeks of evidence in a way which reflects their genuine conviction that the verdict was wrong or open to considerable doubt: as a result, a body of distinguished opinion may grow up to the same effect. All that has happened here.

In responding to these pressures, a Home Secretary must never allow himself to forget that he is an elected politician and that, under our system, the process of justice must be kept separate from the political process. It is open to others to say: "If I were trying that case as a judge, I would have given a different summing up," or, "If I had been on that jury, I would have reached a different verdict." But it is not open to a Home Secretary simply to substitute his own view of a case for that of the courts. It would be an abuse of his powers if he were to act as though he or those who might advise him constituted some higher court of law.

A different situation arises, of course, if new evidence or some new consideration of substance is produced which was not available at the trial or before the Court of Appeal. In any civilised system of justice, there must be a means whereby a case can be reopened so that new matters can be assessed alongside the old evidence by due process of law. This distinction between new evidence and differences of opinion about old evidence has governed the way in which my predecessors have used the power under section 17 of the 1968 Criminal Appeal Act to refer cases to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Robert Kee, in his book "Trial and Error", implies that this distinction is a technicality. I disagree. In my view, it is fundamental. It is hard to see how the Court of Appeal could fail to dismiss any reference to it based simply on the proposition, argued without fresh evidence, that its predecessors and the jury had got it wrong. More important, perhaps, this House and the public would rightly become deeply suspicious of a convention which enabled politicians to throw a verdict into doubt simply because they had developed, without any fresh evidence, a view that the verdict may have been mistaken. Once such a convention had become established, the door would be wide open to interference in any case in which a Home Secretary thought it convenient to bow to pressure to have a case reopened.

Thus I believe that my predecessors were right to take a principled view of the circumstances in which it is proper to exercise the power of reference to the Court of Appeal, and after much thought I mean to follow them.

I turn to the cases. Mrs. Maguire, her husband Patrick, two of her sons, Vincent and Patrick, her brother-in-law Patrick "Guiseppe" Conlon, Patrick O'Neill and Sean Smyth, were convicted in March 1976 of unlawfully handling explosives. The prosecution case rested almost entirely on the results of TLC on thin layer chromatography tests which indicated that all seven defendants had handled nitroglycerine. After a trial lasting six and a half weeks, during which the scientific evidence was examined at great length, all seven were found guilty. In July 1977 the full court, after a hearing lasting 10 days, refused their applications for leave to appeal.

The defendants had protested their innocence throughout and have continued to do so. The case has been reviewed previously, most notably in the period 1980 to 1983 and following a debate in another place in May 1985, by which time Mrs. Maguire the last to complete her sentence, had been released from prison.

I have examined with the greatest care the arguments which have been advanced in particular by Mr. Kee in his book published last October. I am clear that there is no new evidence or consideration of substance which I can regard as casting doubt on the safety of the convictions. I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses a memorandum which sets out in greater detail the reasons why I have reached this conclusion. None of the arguments now presented succeeds, in my view, in challenging the scientific evidence. The scientific validity of the TLC test—which is not the same test as that used in the Birmingham case—has not been undermined. The main argument which Mr. Kee advances — that the samples must have been accidentally or deliberately contaminated — is not supported by any evidence. In these circumstances I can see no grounds on which it would be right for me, following the principle I have stated, to refer the case to the Court of Appeal.

I turn next to the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings. In October 1975, after a trial lasting over a month, Patrick Armstrong, Gerard Conlon, Paul Hill and Carole Richardson were found guilty of carrying out the bombing of two pubs in Guildford in October 1974 in which five people died. At the same trial, Armstrong and Hill were convicted of two murders arising from the bombing of a public house in Woolwich in November 1974. All were found guilty by unanimous verdicts. In October 1977, after a hearing lasting 11 days, the full court refused applications for leave to appeal.

These convictions were based wholly on confessions made by the four to the police. It is common ground, and was fully before the court of trial and the Court of Appeal, that there were a number of inconsistencies and contradictions in the statements made. All four alleged at trial that those statements were untrue and that they had been improperly obtained. All four put forward alibis, which were plainly not accepted by the jury. Later, between the trial and the appeal, members of the

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

Balcombe street gang and Brendan Dowd claimed that they, and not the four, were responsible for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings, and these claims formed the main plank of the four's grounds of appeal.

However, the Court of Appeal concluded that there had been

"a cunning and skilful attempt to deceive the Court by putting foward false evidence".

The Court of Appeal also specifically considered Carole Richardson's alibi evidence, and concluded that it was concocted.

Again, I have carried out a detailed examination of the points which have been raised about these convictions. However, it is clear to me that no new substantive points have been raised. The arguments that have been put forward simply repeat or rework those that were aired at trial or on appeal. Indeed, Mr. Kee acknowledges that there is no new evidence. I have had to conclude that there are no grounds that would justify my referring the case to the Court of Appeal. Again, I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses a memorandum which sets out in greater detail the reasons for my decision.

Finally, I turn to the case of the six men who were convicted in respct of the Birmingham pub bombings. In August 1975, after a two-month trial, Hugh Callaghan, Patrick Hill, Robert Hunter, Noel McIlkenny, William Power and John Walker were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in respect of the bombing of two public houses in Birmingham in November 1974 in which 21 people were killed and 162 injured. Applications by the six men for leave to appeal were refused by the full court on 30 March 1976. The men later pursued a civil action that was eventually dismissed by the House of Lords in 1981.

The prosecution case rested principally on admissions made by the six men in police custody, together with scientific evidence that indicated that two of the men had handled nitroglycerine. The six men maintained at trial that the admissions had been secured by means of police brutality and intimidation. The defence also disputed the scientific evidence, alleging that the results obtained on the Griess test were due to contact with a harmless substance called nitrocellulose.

As the House will be aware, the safety of these convictions had since been challenged, notably in two "World in Action' programmes and in a book published by Mr. Chris Mullin in June last year.

I have examined all the material with great care. I am satisfied that there is new evidence that would justify my referring this case to the Court of Appeal, and I have now done so. The effect of my action is that the case will now be treated as an appeal by the six men and is sub judice. The House will therefore understand why I cannot comment in detail. I can say, however, that the grounds relate to the scientific evidence given at the trial and the recent allegations by ex-PC Clarke that he witnessed intimidation of five of the six men in police custody and saw signs of injury on them.

I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of a letter which I have today sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) and the report of a reappraisal of the Griess test that was conducted at my request by the Aldermaston forensic science laboratory.

Following consultation between the chief constables of the West Midlands and the Devon and Cornwall forces, the latter force has been asked to undertake further inquiries into the allegations made by Mr. Clarke. The results of that investigation will be made available to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the appellants.

I should add, for the avoidance of doubt, that the Court of Appeal is not confined to considering those matters which form the grounds of reference by me and that it is open to the appellants to seek to place before the court any matters which they wish to raise on their behalf.

As the House will recognise, these have not been easy decisions to take. I have thought it right to maintain the principle that I should interfere with the verdict of a court only where there is some new evidence or new consideration of substance which casts doubt on the safety of the convictions. The second necessary principle is that, where such material is to hand, no consideration of amour propre or possible embarrassment should prevent a referral of the case. I believe that by following these principles a Home Secretary can best serve the interests of justice.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The House will wish to thank the Home Secretary for that properly lengthy statement. His decision to refer the Birmingham case to the Court of Appeal under his section 17 powers is wholly right. He will recall that I recently led a delegation to him about this case. I know that he will agree that his decision is due to the pressure of many people and organisations, including many of my hon. Friends, and I pay tribute to all who have campaigned on this issue.

Could the Home Secretary tell the House a little more about the procedure to be followed and the likely time scale of the proceedings that he has announced today? While I welcome what he said about the Birmingham case, I am disappointed by his faiilure to take similar action on the other cases with which his statement deals.

The scientific evidence in the Maguire case is not as secure as the Home Secretary implies, since it has emerged that the test which the prosecution contended was uniquely applicable was not. That is particularly troubling in a case where many believe that there has never been incontrovertible proof that a crime was committed by anyone, let along by the Maguires.

In the case of the Guildford bombings, testing of the police refutation of the alibi of Carole Richardson shows strongly that it would have been well-nigh impossible for her to get to her concert within the necessary time scale after her alleged role in the Guildford crime. Furthermore, as the Home Secretary has just pointed out, the Balcombe street confessions, although considered by the Court of Appeal, were not available to the jury which delivered its verdict on that case. In those circumstances the Home Secretary should also have bitten the bullet on those two cases and acted under his section 17 powers.

For those reasons, will the Home Secretary consider this proposal? After the conclusion of the Birmingham appeal, whatever the outcome, will he consider setting up an inquiry, under a senior judge with lay assessors, to consider the general question of confession evidence and how it should be handled in future? All three of the cases to which he has referred today, as well as the Bridgewater case which, some time ago, he rightly decided should be reinvestigated, depended heavily on confession evidence which has since been called into question.

We should consider carefully whether uncorroborated confessions should be admissable as evidence unless they have been at least audio-recorded and, most desirably, video-recorded. If the Home Secretary agrees to consider setting up such an inquiry, and I hope he will, will he request the inquiry as part of its remit to consider the confession evidence in the cases that he has dealt with in his statement today, together with the Bridgewater case?

The bombing crimes with which the Home Secretary has dealt today are some of the most serious and savage ever committed in Britain. Everyone would want to see the perpetrators punished with the utmost stringency. If the wrong people have been convicted, it is not only an unacceptable injustice to those who have been convicted, but means that the real and vile culprits of the crimes may still be at large and free to commit further atrocities.

Finally, if capital punishment for murder in general, or terrorist murder in particular, had been in operation in 1974, the Home Secretary's action today would have been academic, since the victims of any ascertained injustice would not be alive to receive a remedy or even the prospect of one. Therefore, is not his statement about Birmingham today the conclusive answer to those who still campaign for capital punishment?

Mr. Hurd: My decision on the Birmingham case was the result of careful consideration which has taken some time—longer than some hon. Members would want—because of the often fresh suggestions and allegations being made. The suggestions recently made by Mr. Clarke were recent and had to be taken into account. I cannot say how quickly the Court of Appeal will move, but the timing is now in its hands and I am sure that it will wish to avoid any avoidable delay.

On the Maguire and Guildford cases, the Maguires were found guilty on a charge of possessing explosives—a fairly narrow charge—and the evidence based on the TLC test was addressed to that charge, not to anything wider. I have taken considerable trouble to establish that there is no serious scientific questioning on the validity of that test.

Carole Richardson's alibi was tested repeatedly at great length during the court proceedings. The Balcombe street and Dowd confessions were similarly tested with great thoroughness by the Court of Appeal, which reached a very clear conclusion about them. There is no connection between the Birmingham case on the one hand and the Guildford and Maguire cases on the other. I do not entirely follow the right hon. Gentleman's point.

We have often discussed the point of principle about uncorroborated evidence. I remember that the right hon. Gentleman and I discussed that point frequently during the passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Most people would agree that in each case it is for the court to decide whether evidence that comes forward without corroboration is to be believed. I do not think that this is ground which should be tilled all over again.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he has taken firm, clear and courageous decisions which must be supported in the interests of justice? In connection with the horrific bombings in my constituency of Guildford and those who were convicted as a result, will he reassure us categorically that, in reaching his decision in that case, he found not the slightest trace of new evidence or evidence in the case before the Appeal Court which could in any way be subsequently questioned or discredited before finally reaching the conclusion that he announced today? If he can give that assurance, that will at least reassure those who have been pressing for that case to be reopened.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I examined the Guildford case with great care. Against the tests that I have described, I am satisfied that in the Guildford case there was no new evidence or new matters of substance — I did not stick on the definition of evidence—not before the original court or the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): Will the Home Secretary accept that those of us who have been concerned with these matters will agree with his statement that these are not easy decisions to make and also accept that he reiterated many sensible principles during his statement? Will he also accept that while I, as the Home Secretary at the time, am glad that he has taken action with regard to the Birmingham case, he would have been better advised to take all three cases together — Guildford, Maguire and Birmingham—and to have set up a special inquiry under a very senior judicial chairman to consider whether there was something in the climate of the time conducive to an unsafe verdict?

Clearly, all three cases are not exactly the same. However, they have sufficient features in common that I think that he will find it difficult if the Birmingham verdict was overturned—perhaps if not—to hold the line on the other cases. Will he not accept that, in the interests of the authority of the law, apart from anything else, it would be better if the cases were considered together rather than have it dragged from him piecemeal?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He is clearly on record as Home Secretary in making a strict definition to the House of the way in which a Home Secretary should refer cases to the Court of Appeal. He is now making not that proposition but a wider one which I understand. I am a little surprised that he should link all the cases together. There is a link between the Guildford and Maguire cases, but there is no link between those and the Birmingham case. I am a little surprised that with his experience he should take that line.

I am not sure where the special inquiry which the right hon. Gentleman has proposed would lead. It would not really be fair to ask a distinguished judge and lay assessors to assess something so vague as the climate of opinion. If we followed that practice on these matters, I am not certain what the outcome would be. Clearly, it would be open to anyone after the passage of years to claim that the climate of opinion had changed and therefore the verdicts were unsafe. In these cases, the judges concerned in the summing up went to considerable pains to ensure that the juries were aware of the danger of allowing the emotions of the moment to dominate their judgment. I am sure that that was correct and that that was the right way to handle matters. I do not see how a special inquiry of the sort suggested by the right hon. Gentleman would do anything but leave matters in the air.

Sir John Farr (Harborough) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Sir John Farr: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the correct and courageous decision he has taken in

[Sir John Farr]

respect of the Birmingham six? Will he give an undertaking to the House that, when the matter is considered by the Court of Appeal, as continued imprisonment or otherwise will rest so much upon the new evidence that has already been submitted to him, he will do the best he can to ensure that the new evidence is considered by a jury?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. On my hon. Friend's last point, it is not in my power to order a retrial. One of the choices open to the Court of Appeal is to quash the verdict and order a retrial, but that is something for the Court.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Obviously, all of us who have become convinced that the conviction of the Birmingham six was unsafe will welcome the Home Secretary's announcement. However, does the Home Secretary remember the case of Cooper and McMahon that was referred to the Court of Appeal four times and was turned down four times, until eventually the Home Office released the men from prison? Is he convinced that the Court of Appeal has the open-minded and fair approach to the cases that it needs to have? Many of us are worried that history might repeat itself and that justice might still not be done?

Mr. Hurd: I am aware of the case of Cooper and McMahon and I have discussed it with my noble Friend Lord Whitelaw who was Home Secretary at the time. We are clear that there is no comparison between that and the Birmingham case. The hon. Lady is obliquely suggesting that in some way it would be right in this case for the Home Secretary to use the Prerogative to advise Her Majesty to pardon those concerned. In order to do that, a Home Secretary has to be convinced of innocence. I do not see how, in this case, any Home Secretary could go down that path.

Sir Edward Gardner (Fylde): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be much sympathy for the difficulties he has had to face in reaching the decision that there is new evidence to justify the reopening of the Birmingham pub bombing case? Will he further accept that his decision in those circumstances to refer the case again to the Court of Appeal will be welcomed as a wise and satisfactory way of dealing not only with the case itself and any uncertainty that may surround it, but with the public disquiet that has been raised by the case?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. There is a temptation in these matters to take what, in purely immediate and political terms, would be the easier course, which is to refer more widely or to set up an inquiry. However, for the reasons I have given, it seemed that that temptation could lead to great difficulties for myself, my successors or the criminal justice system as a whole. I am glad to have my hon. and learned Friend's support.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Is the Home Secretary aware that I am glad that he has affirmed today his own personal responsibility for the decision he has announced? There are some decisions that a Home Secretary has to take that cannot be put in commission to the Cabinet.

On the Birmingham case and the procedures of the Court of Appeal, in view of a press report—I was not quite sure what the Home Secretary said today—is he saying that the Appeal Court judges, if they wish, could have a jury subpoenaed? Will people other than the appellants be allowed to send written evidence or ask to appear or is it only in the control of the appellants he has named today?

In view of the allegations made by Mr. Mullin that he has spoken to people in the Republic who claimed that they had carried out that crime, is there any way in which the right hon. Gentleman can ask the West Midlands police to start investigations into the allegations at this stage and not wait for the outcome of the Court of Appeal procedures?

On the Guildford case, I accept that there is no new evidence and that the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. If only because the confessions were the only grounds on which the accused were sentenced, I shall continue to support those who feel strongly about this case. Deep down, there is something wrong with the Guildford decisions.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman says that, but it runs against his own statements as Home Secretary when, in a letter of 9 March 1979 about a case, he wrote:

"I cannot substitute my judgment for that of the courts on the facts before them. I can intervene only if some significant new evidence or consideration comes to light that the courts have not previously considered".

Mr. Rees: Absolutely.

Mr. Hurd: I followed exactly the line that the right hon. Gentleman then outlined. I repeat that it is for the Court of Appeal to decide. One of the options before it is to quash the previous verdict and order a new trial by jury.

As I understand it, the position as regards matter before the court is exactly the same as in any other case in which someone appeals against a conviction. It will be for the appellants—obviously, they will have access to lawyers to prepare their case—to decide what matters to bring before the court. Of course, among the matters that they may wish to bring before the Court are the points raised by Mr. Mullin about certain things that he believes have been said to him. I cannot safely go into those matters. It will be for the appellants to prepare and mobilise their case.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, as the constituency Member for the Maguire family, I have made representations to him about the concern arising over the validity of the forensic evidence? Although I respect and fully understand what my right hon. Friend has said to the House today, that concern will persist. If some additional fact or new evidence is produced, will my right hon. Friend reconsider the matter in the light of that evidence?

Mr. Hurd: I pay tribute to the fair and even-handed way in which my hon. Friend has sustained this case on behalf of his constituents. The Maguire verdict rested overwhelmingly on the thin layer chromatography test. Obviously, it is not enough to say that there are now new tests that did not exist before. The question is whether, in any way, the TLC test has been undermined or discredited. I am satisfied that it has not been. Obviously, if evidence came forward—I think it is unlikely—that discredits this test, as opposed to showing that it should have been corroborated or that other tests are now available, it will have to be examined.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): As the Home Secretary, by his answer today, has made it clear that it is possible that innocent people have been convicted—that is the basis of his reference of the Birmingham case to the Appeal Court — will he not recognise also that, since the conviction was by a jury, and he himself has said that new evidence has arisen, this measure should again go to a jury, as other hon. Members have said? Even though the Home Secretary may not have the power to direct that the case go to a jury, will he not state that, having been satisfied that new evidence is available, he himself is also of the view that that new evidence should go to a jury for that body to assess it and not be left solely in the hands of the Appeal Court?

Mr. Hurd: No, I cannot do that. Under the law, it is for the Court of Appeal to decide that matter. That is right. In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's first comment, I must make it clear that, although I have taken this action in the Birmingham case, I do not express any view about the verdict one way or the other. I simply say that, in my judgment, there is new and substantial matter that justifies a reference to the Court of Appeal.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary aware that some of us will find his full confidence in the TLC test in the Guildford case rather surprising? Is my right hon. Friend aware also that I first raised in the House the case of the late Giuseppe Conlon and, therefore, the Maguires in 1980? The efforts that are being made by many hon. Members, and indeed by other people of different opinions outside, will not cease now.

Mr. Hurd: Over many years, my hon. Friend has been tireless in pursuing this case. I entirely accept that he is one of those whom I mentioned who have formed the view that, if he had been a judge in that case, he would have handled it differently, and if he had been a member of the jury, he would have reached a different conclusion on the evidence. That is an absolutely honourable position to take. I have not been able to find after a careful study of his representations over the years, or of Mr. Kee's book, any other matter—that is, new matter or new evidence —that casts doubt on the TLC test, which, as I have said, was the basis of the prosecution and the basis of the conviction of the Maguires and their co-defendants on this charge, which was, I repeat, a charge of possessing explosives.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Secretary of State has stated his principal view on procedure. However, will he not agree that the essential principal view is that the innocent should never be found guilty and be caused to suffer as a result? In the light of the Northern Ireland experience of uncorroborated confession evidence, will he not reconsider his position and examine the possibility of a special inquiry into the other cases so that we can be absolutely sure that everything has been done to prevent the possibility of an innocent person being made to serve long periods in prison?

Mr. Hurd: The question, in the interests of justice, is what is the most secure way of establishing the difference between guilt and innocence. I have set out my approach to that at some length. In previous incarnations, the hon. Gentleman and I have argued about uncorroborated evidence in Northern Ireland. One may have a certain point of view, but the argument that in no circumstances should uncorroborated evidence be accepted by a court, whatever the view of the court, would not find favour in most jurisdictions. It should be for the court to decide in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): As one who has been involved in obtaining two royal pardons for wrongly convicted persons, I congratulate the Home Secretary on his extremely difficult and responsible decision. In general, I draw his attention to the Evidence Act 1895 that the law of England imposed on all her dependent colonies. Under sections 25 and 26 of that Act, no confession made by a person to a police officer while in custody is admissible in evidence, and no confession to any other person except a magistrate while a person is in police custody is admissible as evidence. That is still the law of most of our now independent colonies. Might it not be a good idea, if the law of England thought it fit to impose those provisions on dependent colonies in 1895, to reintroduce them in England in 1987?

Mr. Hurd: I do not agree with my hon. and learned Friend who, through no fault of his own, was not on the Committee that examined the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. We examined the matter of uncorroborated evidence while we were elaborating the safeguards for interviewing persons in policy custody—safeguards that, clearly, are important. I repeat the view which I formed then and in which I have been reinforced since—that it is for the court to decide, having listened to the evidence and having noted the fact—if it is a fact—that it is not corroborated, whether it is safe evidence.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is there not a basic flaw in our judicial system when it takes a sustained campaign by hon. Members and distinguished journalists to persuade the Home Secretary to refer the Birmingham case to the Court of Appeal 11 years after conviction? If the Home Secretary rejects the suggestion by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) to set up a special inquiry, will he consider setting up a special monitoring committee that could constantly review cases of fresh evidence and confessional evidence and make public recommendations to him?

Mr. Hurd: Not long ago, the Select Committee on Home Affairs went into that suggestion carefully and there was an exchange with the Government, under my predecessor, on that point. I believe that the section 17 procedure, which is basically what we are discussing, is a useful and valid way of performing that task. It puts the emphasis not on the politicians—whether hon. Members or Ministers — or on an inquiry by persons of whose status one cannot be quite sure but back where it ought to belong, on the courts of law. I believe that that is the right answer if we are to sustain confidence in those courts.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): As one of the few non-lawyers in the House at the moment, may I ask the Home Secretary about a point of procedure which has not been cleared up so far during questions? Will the appellants have the right to address the Court of Appeal? The right hon. Gentleman has referred constantly to the giving of evidence and admissions. Will the men have the right to speak and to be heard? Can the Court of Appeal allow that? I ask those questions for one reason: I know

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

from personal experience that the men have not felt fully confident to talk to those who have visited them from time to time in prison.

Mr. Hurd: They will be in the same position as anyone else who makes an appeal. It will be for the Court of Appeal to establish the procedure; it will be for the appellants to prepare their case. Although they will remain in prison, they will have access to legal advisers and therefore will be able to prepare their case. I understand that normally they would receive legal aid in preparing their case.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he refers cases to the Court of Appeal only when they raise a justiciable issue, and that media and political hue and cry are not enough, nor are vague and sentimental misgivings about decisions that have already been upheld in the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Hurd: I do not in any way criticise those people in any part of the House or outside who have devoted a great deal of time to seeking to persuade my predecessor and me that one or more of these convictions were unsafe. That is a perfectly honourable course to take. It has generated a good deal of genuine feeling. I have been trying to say —this is my hon. and learned Friend's point—that I do not think that it is the job of a Home Secretary to allow those considerations to deflect him from what I believe is the principal course of cueing back to the Court of Appeal when he thinks that there are grounds for doing so.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): If the Home Secretary feels unable to support the view which is expressed on both sides of the House, and which I share, that there should be a new jury trial, will he at least consider appointing a Queen's counsel to oversee the referral? Will he ensure that the defence has access to all the information that has been available to the prosecution before and since the original trial?

Mr. Hurd: I do not see the purpose of arranging for a QC to supervise the referral. The referral has been made in the proper form to the court, and I have confidence in the way in which the court will handle it. I should not like to answer the hon. Gentleman's second point off the cuff, but I shall certainly let him know the answer.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard to the fact that another statement and a ten-minute Bill application are to follow, and that no fewer than 50 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to take part in the later debate. Therefore, I shall allow two more questions from each side of the House.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that most fair-minded people will regard his difficult decisions as entirely right? Those decisions demonstrate once again that the system of justice in England in among the best in the world.

Mr. Hurd: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): In view of the time it has already taken the Home Secretary to reach his welcome decision on the Birmingham case, when will the police begin their inquiry into what happened to these people in police custody?

Mr. Hurd: That has been gone into over and over again. As I said in my statement, the Devon and Cornwall constabulary will investigate further one of the new facts to which I drew attention—the allegations of ex-Police Constable Clarke. Thereafter, it is for the Court of Appeal to weigh the different considerations. That further investigation by the police is under way.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend accept that he was entirely right to reject the idea that there is no distinction to be made between hard new evidence and mere speculation about different interpretations? Does he agree that, if he had not been prepared to draw that distinction, although his task might have been easier today, it would have been extremely hard for other holders of his office in due course to resist any reinterpretation by well-minded people of cases many years after they were first heard?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend. One must take a long view. I am glad that the House of Commons has, on the whole, upheld that.

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): We welcome the Home Secretary's decision on the Birmingham pub case, but we are disappointed by his action on other cases, especially the Guildford and Maguire cases. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned that one reason why he decided to refer the Birmingham pub case to the Court of Appeal was the new evidence presented by a police officer. Would it not be a great irony if the uncorroborated testimony, which the right hon. Gentleman has said that he cannot overrule, in the Guildford and Maguire cases was put in jeopardy — as the Birmingham case has been put in jeopardy — because a police officer subsequently came forward to say, "I can support the allegations of these people. The confession resulted from duress"?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the House of Lords——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly.

Mr. McGuire: I shall be as brief as I can, Sir.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the House of Lords threw out the Birmingham appeal on the basis that no police officer could ever have been guilty of what those concerned with the Birmingham pub bombing said happened? Now we are told that a policeman has come forward and that the case will be re-examined. Is that not enough evidence to get all three cases referred and put out of the way rather than to consider them bit by bit?

Mr. Hurd: The difficulty with the hon. Gentleman's argument is that Mr. Clarke has come forward in respect of the Birmingham case and no one has come forward in respect of the Guildford or Maguire cases. I am not saying whether Mr. Clarke's allegations are correct. I am simply saying that they are part of the pattern which has persuaded me to agree to a reference. There has been no similar coming forward in the other cases.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall have regard on a subsequent occasion to those hon. Members whom I have not been able to call on this statement.

Severe Weather Payments

4.17 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about supplementary benefit payments for exceptionally cold weather.

Last Tuesday, I informed the House that for that week payments of £5 would be made available to everyone in the qualifying groups to help them heat their homes during the current extremely cold spell. This announcement was made in the expectation that the trigger point of minus 1·5 deg C in the regulations would be reached. In the event, that judgment has proved to be correct and the trigger point has been reached widely throughout the country. In many areas it was dramatically exceeded with average temperatures as low as minus 5 deg C. In two thirds of the weather stations, average temperatures for last week of minus 2 deg C and below were recorded. In these extremely rare circumstances, I believe the decision that we took to announce the payment early last week has been amply vindicated.

The Government have considered carefully the position both for this week and future weeks. As I told the House last week, our primary concern is to ensure that vulnerable groups should not be discouraged from heating their homes. It is clear that many people are still experiencing difficulties and are looking for assurance that they will get extra help to keep warm this winter.

In these circumstances, I wish to make it clear, therefore, that a further payment of £5 will be available, for this week only, to all those in the qualifying groups. This entitlement will be widely advertised and existing claimants who have already made a claim will be paid automatically if eligible. Others eligible may claim immediately.

The Government believe that our initiative in introducing a statutory entitlement to extra help in very cold weather was right. The rules are clear and can be operated speedily, fairly and effectively. But we recognise the anxieties felt by vulnerable groups that the temperature trigger point may not be reached even in prolonged periods of cold weather. Since the whole purpose of this cold weather payment is to give people the confidence to keep warm, we have decided to amend the trigger point from minus 1·5 deg C, to 0 deg C—freezing point. I have today laid amending regulations before the House to this effect. Our intention is that they will come into operation from next Monday, 26 January. In all other respects, the scheme will continue to operate as presently designed.

The amending regulations also provide for the further payment of £5 in respect of this week. The additional cost is within the normal margin of adjustment to the social security programme and will be met from the reserve.

I believe that the Government have acknowledged anxieties that have been expressed. Today, we have responded to them quickly, flexibly and with great concern. I hope that the House will welcome this statement.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the Minister aware that the further £5 payment for this week is certainly welcome? It is the frankest possible admission of the utter inadequacy of this scheme. Even last week, under the scheme, 15 areas throughout the country did not trigger payment. Does he accept that the Government's climbdown in establishing the slightly higher trigger temperature is more because of their concern to avoid a weekly political row than an attempt to establish a principle of guaranteed warmth for the elderly—something that the scheme will still not achieve?

Why does not the Minister announce that not only were the Government wrong, but that he will put matters right and pay all pensioners on supplementary benefit and low-income families with babies a regular £5 for every week throughout this winter? That is what the Labour party has repeatedly proposed.

Is the Minister aware that, while the Government have spent three weeks dithering about how to save their political face, at least 50 pensioners have been dying each week of hypothermia? They will continue to die in those numbers despite the introduction of the latest proposals.

Is the Minister further aware that clinging to the extremely low temperature threshold as a condition for claiming payment remains arbitrary and uncertain, which is still a major stumbling block to the old and cold struggling to keep their homes warm? As the Prime Minister denounced this scheme as "strict bureaucratic procedures", why are the Government hell-bent on reverting to it at the first opportunity?

I want to ask the Minister a number of specific questions about the delivery of this payment. When will all pensioners get it, considering the huge backlog at social security offices? How will the housebound elderly be paid? Will the DHSS accept bulk claims on behalf of sick and disabled pensioners from voluntary or charitable organisations? Under what powers is the Minister proposing, for the second week running, retrospectively to validate claims that fall outside the regulations passed in December?

Will the Minister, in co-operation with the Secretary of State for Energy, write to the electricity and gas boards instructing them immediately to cease disconnections of supplies to pensioners and low-income families with babies as long as the bitter cold lasts? Should not the boards review all existing disconnections of supplies when pensioners or families with babies are at risk?

As the Minister has now acknowledged—I am glad to say—his mistake in not adopting a somewhat higher temperature threshold in the first place, will he also undertake to make retrospective payments, where appropriate, at the new trigger point?

Lastly, is the Minister aware that his reference to "only" 643 deaths from hypothermia has been received with dismay and disgust? Will he now retract that innuendo and apologise and acknowledge that pensioners are not just dismissable statistics—*[Interruption.]*—but people who deserve and have the right to the same care as anyone else? Would not the best demonstration of his good intent be an undertaking to adopt our scheme for a special fuel premium to be paid throughout the winter? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman's remarks, particularly the latter, are more than usually distasteful, and with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall respond to them in detail.

The remark attributed to me, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is not in context and is set against the

[Mr. Major]

figure of 16,000 hypothermia deaths that has been claimed by some people. My reference was to the fact that only 643 medical certificates included mention of the word "hypothermia". The advice of the vast majority of medical experts is that hypothermia is the cause of death only when there is a substantive prior cause, to which hypothermia is then added. I was seeking not to disregard the importance of a single death from hypothermia, but to place the matter in a proper context. The report from which the hon. Gentleman quoted was sloppy, unprofessional and, in my judgment, out of context.

I am not surprised—although I am saddened—that the hon. Gentleman should be so typically churlish in relation to the Government measures.

The claims we receive in our local offices will be dealt with as a priority, and instructions to that effect were given last week. Payments will be made by giro, as is the normal fashion, to avoid people having to leave home. Claims should be submitted in the fashion that I outlined last week, which was shown in newspaper advertisements and other media.

I dealt with validation in my original statement. With regard to disconnections, we have a long-standing arrangement for people in vulnerable groups that disconnections do not arbitrarily take place. It is odd that the hon. Gentleman raised his point on retrospection, in view of his remarks about validation. I think that he might care to reflect and withdraw his earlier remarks and the distasteful and inaccurate references that he made last night on the subject of winter deaths.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Does not my hon. Friend agree that the reaction to the succession of Government measures, including those announced this afternoon, to alleviate the problems of the elderly, which are in stark and striking contrast with the appalling record of both the Labour Government and of those members of the SDP when they were formerly in government, suggests that the real answer to the long-standing national problem of deaths from hypothermia in this country requires a careful and dispassionate national approach, free of political hysteria whipped up by the Opposition parties and by certain political pressure groups?

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with the observations of my hon. Friend. There is no doubt that the primary problem is not so much that of hypothermia deaths as the larger problem of excess winter deaths, and that is a matter of considerable complexity.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross Cromarty and Skye): I welcome the Minister's statement, so far as it goes. It is a sensible change—*[Interruption.]* Yes, so far as it goes—[AN HON. MEMBER: "What more do you want?"] If hon. Members will allow me, I shall continue. We want further improvements to the scheme — for example, on the eligibility of claimants. Not all people are within the net of eligibility. For instance, women on supplementary pension aged over 60 but under 65 do not fall within its remit.

Secondly, the monitoring stations that the Minister selected — which, to take the Scottish example, are coastal — do not give accurate readings of the general temperature. Thirdly, on the criterion that the average temperature must, as now amended, reach 0 deg. or must fall to 0 deg over a period between Monday and the following Sunday, will he consider altering that to an average temperature of 0 deg over any given period of seven days? Will the Minister look at these three specific areas, where he could make further improvements?

Mr. Major: I shall study carefully what the hon. Gentleman said, but it is most unlikely that I shall be able to undertake to make the changes that he proposes.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Is my hon. Friend aware that there will be very great appreciation outside the House that the Minister has proved so flexible in an area where flexibility is very definitely needed? Has he noted that the words of the Opposition would positively encourage people not to pay their fuel bills? Furthermore, in the case of severe weather payments, will he always pay out on the smallest of incomes rather than on calendar age and also on freezing temperatures rather than on calendar dates? Such rules, I believe, would be helpful.

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Our underlying concern throughout the passage of these regulations has been to ensure that vulnerable groups have the confidence to keep warm. My concern, in view of the last few days, is that that confidence, rather than the regulations, might have been in danger. That is the primary reason why I have sought to bring forward the change that I have announced today.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Was the Government's inflexibility really worth all the embarrassment?

Mr. Major: It is a curiosity that the Government are being accused by the Opposition Front Bench of changing the scheme almost daily and by Opposition Back Benchers of being inflexible. They cannot both be right.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the new measures that he has announced, which will be in addition to those that already exist, will be widely welcomed? None the less, will he accept that many old people in particular have very real concern over the payment of their heating bills and are often tempted to turn down the heating at critical times when they should be keeping it up? In order to allay these fears about when the money will come, and how, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of the Government issuing vouchers at the outset of each winter that could be encashed on Government order, thereby making older people and those on low incomes more certain that the money will come immediately?

Mr. Major: I am afraid that I cannot promise my hon. Friend that we shall follow that route. It is precisely to ensure that vulnerable groups had the confidence to keep warm that we have made the change that I have announced this afternoon. It is, I believe, well understood on our side of the House, and I hope that it is understood throughout the country, that in the three tiers of assistance with heating—supplementary benefit, heating additions and the exceptionally cold weather payments—we now have the most generous system of assistance with heating that we have ever had in this country. I deeply regret that the Opposition are more concerned with making political points than with acknowledging that reality.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Although I welcome today's announcement and the other announcement—

two announcements within eight days seem to say more about the inadequacy of the Government's regulations than any benefits that they are providing — will the Minister consider reintroducing the electricity discount scheme that was introduced by the last Labour Government? It helped to cover the cost of the electricity used by 4·5 million people in Britain, not the 1·5 million people whom these regulations will cover.

Mr. Major: I have no intention of reintroducing one of the most shambolic schemes of recent years.

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): My hon. Friend is to be congratulated on acting promptly and flexibly for the second week running. He has shown by action that this Government care. That is preferable to the whirlwind of meaningless words from the Opposition Benches. However, does my hon. Friend accept that many people still do not understand that a standard heating addition is paid to those on supplementary benefit, amounting to £2·20 for those over 65 and £5·50 for those over 85? Therefore, will he continue to emphasise that fact?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He shares my concern that it is important to keep people warm during the winter months. He is absolutely right that the level of heating addition now paid weekly, with benefit, and extended substantially during the period of this Government, now amounts to about £400 million a year. That amount is substantially larger than anything that was envisaged under any previous Government.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): May I welcome the rate of progress that the Minister is making? I hope very much that from minus 1·5 degC, and now 0 deg, by this time next week he will have gone as far as plus 1·5 degC. If he continues at that rate, I am sure that all Opposition Members will be delighted. However, will not all these good things come to an end when, from April 1988, the Government introduce the social fund? All grants will be ended and recoverable loans will be introduced instead. This is a plain charade and electioneering.

Mr. Major: I offer the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he can anticipate no more weekly statements. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] As for the situation that will apply after 1 April 1988, we have repeatedly made it clear throughout the last few months that we shall monitor carefully the working of the scheme. No decision has yet been taken about precisely what the situation will be after 1 April 1988, but a statement will be made in very good time.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his sensitive, sensible and compassionate approach to this very difficult problem? Many elderly and vulnerable people will be grateful to him today. He will have lifted a great burden from their shoulders. However, they are not being helped by the Opposition's cynical exploitation of other people's tragedies.

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Nor were those people helped last week by those who claimed that the trigger point had been rigged and would not be reached. For that reason, many people may not have had the confidence to turn up their heating.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Minister confirm that, as well as being restricted to the artificial Monday to Sunday week, the scheme is also restricted to supplementary pensioners and that anyone who may have saved over £500 for a funeral, for example, is excluded from the scheme? Will he therefore tell us precisely how many of Britain's 10,000,000 pensioners have applied, how many have already received the £5 in their hands and when he expects the rest of them to get the £5?

Mr. Major: The eligibility is wider than the hon. Gentleman has in mind. It extends also to supplementary benefit families with chronically sick or disabled members, or those with very young children. As for the claims, they are still coming in.

Mr. Foulkes: How many have been paid?

Mr. Major: They are still coming in.

Mr. Foulkes: But how many have been paid?

Mr. Major: I reiterate that they are still coming in. Those who have already claimed may expect that we shall deal with this week's claim with last week's claim and that we shall pay it speedily. We will deal with the claims as a matter of priority. No one who is eligible has been turned down.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will my hon. Friend stick to the sensible system of having a week-long assessment period for these heating supplements and then, on occasion, anticipating that a certain week will qualify and making an early announcement? Will he rest assured that old people would much rather have £5 from him, whenever he announces it, than a lot of empty promises from the Opposition, who did nothing when they were in a position to do so?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend's last point is sharply and very well made. I can certainly confirm that we propose to stick to the assessment on a weekly basis, although I cannot promise that, other than in the most extreme weather circumstances, we shall be in a position to make an early announcement of a payment.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will allow three more questions from either side. Then we must move on, for the reasons I have already stated.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): May I congratulate the Minister on changing the regulations, even at this late time, in the sure expectation of many more cold weeks this winter in the run-up to the general election?

The hon. Gentleman has, wittingly or unwittingly, stumbled on a benefit that could be made available to pensioners and others in the future; that is that the money should be promised in advance of the cold weather, as he did last week and is doing now. Is it not time that he found a proper, fair system of heating allowances, rather than stumble from expedient to expedient as he has done over the past two or three weeks?

Mr. Major: The Government have such a system; that is what I have announced.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Will my hon. Friend recognise — and emphasise again in the face of the humbug and cant from the Opposition — that this is the most generous scheme that there has ever been? Will he also confirm that, during the debate that we had on this matter, we were unable to extract from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that within the

[Mr. Robert Atkins]

Opposition's poverty programme any money is allocated for severe weather payments, because the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has forbidden it?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is right both in his reference to the generosity of the three tiers of assistance, and also to the fact that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is keen to make promises about benefits but rather slower to determine how they will be paid for.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Minister has changed the formula from minus 1·5 deg C to 0 deg C in order to qualify for the £5 payment — in other words, introduced a sliding scale — would it not make sense that when the temperature falls to minus 5 deg C pensioners should receive about £15 a week? Will he also take into account the fact that almost every constituent to whom I spoke over the weekend on this issue said that the £500 barrier for supplementary benefit recipients should be removed? Most of them argued that they had saved that money to pay for their burial. If the Minister is to be flexible, he should take that point into account, and we should like him to tell us next week that that is exactly what he will do.

Mr. Major: First, we have not introduced a sliding scale, but a fixed point — freezing point — which will be generally understood by people in the House and beyond. Regarding the £500 disqualification for single payments, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the figure under the previous Labour Government — whom he supported from time to time — was £200 and only latterly in that Government £300.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): My hon. Friend's announcement will be widely welcomed in my constituency where many hundreds, if not thousands, of people will benefit from his announcement today. Is this not a much more sensible use of Government resources than introducing indiscriminate benefits such as free television licences for all old age pensioners? Heating additions and exceptional cold weather payments will be more appreciated by those in need than the sort of indiscriminate benefits promised by the Opposition.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. We have made it a statutory entitlement so that people may be certain that it is there in the prescribed circumstances. I believe that it will be widely welcomed throughout the country.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Since the issue has been canvassed over many winters, why has the Minister now decided that the figure of minus 1·5 deg C should be changed to 0 deg C? What fresh evidence has he had? The Minister claims that his main concern is to make sure that people have the confidence to keep their heating on. Would not the best confidence of all be to pay that money automatically to those who qualify, rather than rely on them having to reply?

Mr. Major: The money is paid automatically. The automatic heating additions are paid weekly for 52 weeks a year. Apparently, that has escaped the hon. Gentleman. Those payments amount to £400 million a year. What has changed my mind is my concern that pensioners might feel that the minus 1·5 deg C trigger point would not be reached. Raising that trigger point will enable them to accept that it will be reached in very cold weather, and they will then turn their heating on and keep warm, which is our prime concern, as we have repeatedly stated from the outset.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): I accept my hon. Friend's announcement today, but will he please accept that a number of elderly people are extremely concerned about the £500 limit? Will he also accept that no hon. Member would want to encourage people to keep their savings in their homes with all the dangers that that would have? I accept the great increase that has taken place under the Government, but will he please reconsider that qualifying figure?

Mr. Major: I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. I cannot offer him an undertaking that I will be able to change that figure in the near future. We have substantially increased the figure and it is not an innovation for single payments.

Several Hon. Members *rose* —

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that there will be a debate on this matter.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take the Standing Order No. 20 application first.

Tobacco Industry (Sports Sponsorship)

4.46 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the agreement on sponsorship of sport by the tobacco industry."

This was published yesterday as a reply to a written question with a copy placed in the Library. It was discussed by every national newspaper today, although we in the House are denied the opportunity of debate unless you, Mr. Speaker, allow the application.

It is an important matter because the Royal College of Physicians estimates that tobacco-related diseases kill 100,000 people a year in this country and 112 people have lung cancer diagnosed every single day. In the United States the Surgeon General has ruled that there is a definite danger to passive smokers' health — that is, to those people who inhale the fumes of other people's tobacco. That is especially important, when one compares those figures with the expected death rate of AIDS — 4,000 people by the end of the decade. The Government give lavish time in both Houses for the debates on that disease.

The matter is specific in that the new agreement that was published yesterday afternoon, without granting an opportunity for debate, is seen as a victory for the tobacco companies by the media. It is only the good sense and decency of the BBC and ITV that is denying them even greater opportunity for spreading their fatal message. It is specific also in that the agreement is to be monitored by the Lazarus committee, which — if ours and other people's reading of the statement is correct — cannot override the Advertising Standards Authority. It is plumb wrong that such deals are made without reference to the House.

The matter is urgent because the country is denied the voice of Parliament in a matter dealing with our duty to care for our fellow citizens, especially those who are young and impressionable. Any association or encouragement to smoke with sport is repugnant. To make no real move to end this relationship is wrong, just as many of us feel that it is improper to make important statements in the form of a reply to a planted question.

Therefore, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to give your consent to this application for a short debate.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the agreement on sponsorship of sport by the tobacco industry."

As the hon. Member knows, my sole consideration when considering these applications is whether to give them precedence over the orders set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has moved is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Local Government Finance Bill

4.50 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): May I raise a point of order under Standing Order No. 69, Mr. Speaker, which relates to the procedure of a Bill that moves from Committee of the whole House directly into Report? You will be aware that yesterday we began the process of considering the Local Government Finance Bill. A certain amount of progress was made last night until about quarter to midnight. It will be accepted on both sides of the House that there was no excessive attempt to delay. As we approach the home straight there will be a sudden acceleration into the last batch of the amendments. Tomorrow, the Bill is due to have all its remaining stages considered. In total there are about 200 amendments and new clauses, including some highly complex Government amendments and one long, complicated schedule.

It is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to go directly from a long Committee stage of the whole House, where lengthy amendments have been debated, and, presumably, disposed of in one way or another, to Report stage because we shall not be able to consider in detail what amendments to table on Report.

What is more, not only shall we not be able to consider the terms of any amendments satisfactorily, but the line numbers to which they relate in the Bill will not be available to us. Therefore, manuscript amendments will, presumably, be passed around, which are not properly related to the Bill or the amendments as passed, and the whole thing will be a mess. Moreover, you, Mr. Speaker, will have the problem of selecting the amendments, and that, again, will be extremely difficult.

The motion to proceed directly to the Report stage is a matter for the House, and as such is debatable. I should very much regret it if we wasted time tomorrow debating procedure rather than getting on with the Bill itself. Would it not be better, Mr. Speaker, for you to use your good offices to see whether it is possible to delay the Report stage so that we can have a satisfactory debate on the Bill as it will then stand?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of that point. The hon. Gentleman has correctly quoted Standing Order No. 69. It is not a matter for me, but I am sure that what he has said will have been heard by the Leader of the House who is present and by others on the Front Bench.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen) *indicated assent.*

Questions to Ministers

4.52 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should be grateful for your advice as to which Department we should table questions on the distribution of some of the Common Market food mountains which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has today said will be distributed to some groups within the country. It would seem that the matter is essentially one for the Department of Health and Social Security. My concern is that if it takes the Government as long to distribute the food as it has taken them to sort out their scheme to give some people £5 a week, most of the food will perish long before it is distributed.

Mr. Speaker: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman consults the Table Office on that.

Public Accounts Commission (Parliamentary Questions)

4.53 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann), said:

"I am told that the matter"—

that is, the matter of the communications project which was referred to in the press at the weekend—

"is still at a preliminary stage and that nothing like the sums that were referred to have been incurred."

He then went on to say:

"I am told that the project is at an experimental stage"—

[AN HON. MEMBER: "What is the point of order?"] Do not worry, it will become clear.

"That is the reason why no large expenditures, or no expenditures on the scale of those mentioned in the newspapers, have yet been incurred."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 594.]

May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule that the right hon. Member for Taunton, with the best will in the world, was out of order in answering that question because his function, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, not the Public Accounts Committee, requires only that he answers questions on the expenditure of the National Audit Office and questions concerning scrutiny of the role and the working of the National Audit Office.

This is important because yesterday a precedent was set for the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission to make statements which, in the normal way, have to be made by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee or in the form of statements in the reports of the Public Accounts Committee. If it is the will of the House to change the present situation whereby the reports of the Public Accounts Committee are debated, into a right for the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission to address the House of Commons and be questioned, let it be by resolution of the House and not by default by giving this new power to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission.

Mr. Speaker: I confirm that the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) is the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission and, as such, he should answer for the Public Accounts Commission and not refer to matters which are properly in the purview of the Public Accounts Committee. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of that Committee, should raise the matter with its Chairman.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I owe it to the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) to say that I believe that in answering my question he was being as utterly helpful as he could be. I gave him notice of the first part of the question back in December and of the electronic surveillance data issue yesterday. However, to be fair to him, I believe that he was trying to treat the House of Commons properly by giving as full an answer as possible.

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If I have offended in some way

against the conventions of the House, I would be the first to apologise. On the other hand, I have never believed it wrong for any hon. Member to seek information in the House, nor for another hon. Member, should he have the honour of the opportunity to provide it, to perform that duty. If, from the Back Benchers, we have been competent in giving information, that is a precedent that Ministers might well follow on many occasions.

Statutory Instruments &c.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that it is not the intention to move Statutory Instruments Nos. 3 and 4. Therefore, with the leave of the House, I shall put Statutory Instruments Nos. 1 and 2 together.

Ordered.

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1987 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Agriculture and Fisheries (Financial Assistance) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Schools Self-Management

4.55 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reform the system of school financing in England and Wales by re-allocating funds to schools on a per capita basis.

At present, as all hon. Members will know, the governors and heads of schools are responsible only for the management of such school funds as are allocated to them by the local education authority. That money is generally known as capitation and it is supposed to cover such items as books and writing materials. While practice varies from local education authority to local education authority, the overwhelming piciture is that capitation is the small change of the system.

Typically, in my constituency a school whose running costs would be about £500,000 would have discretion over only £3,000—less than 1 per cent. of the total budget. Even in Cambridgeshire, which has certainly set the way for and pioneered the delegation of greater responsibility for financial management to individual schools, the actual sums represent well under 10 per cent. of the total and few authorities are even moving in that direction.

Any hon. Member who has been a school governor or senior teacher will be familiar with the problem. I was chairman of the governors of a comprehensive school in Hertfordshire for four years and have been a member of the governing bodies of several primary and secondary schools. We have all come across situations where relatively minor maintenance tasks have to be referred to divisional education offices or even to county hall officials. That causes problems due to both delay and costs.

Such requests have to be accompanied by paperwork and receive proper authorisation from the duly appointed official. If he has a lot of requests at any one time, or is absent or ill, delay occurs. Hon. Members can speculate how many burst pipes in a county might have been reported last week and the delays that might have occurred. Therefore, how very much better it would be if the head, perhaps together with the chairman of the governors, were able to get such jobs carried out properly, paid for out of school funds and with work commissioned from local tradesmen.

I am not suggesting that education is about more efficient plumbing maintenance, but what is true of maintenance is also true of equipment and pay. Presently, schools have to abide by national and countywide arrangements, yet heads and governors have a much better idea of which teachers are worthy of pay increases and promotion and which are not. Therefore, the Bill proposes a new system, based on the following principles.

First, the management of all current funds should be by the head teacher under the policy direction of an accountable board of governors. Secondly, there should be an election on a three-yearly rotating basis of a school board by parents by means of a postal ballot. Thirdly, there should be an allocation of current funds on the basis of the number of pupils on each school roll at the beginning of each year. Fourthly, school funds should be paid directly by the Department of Education and Science. Fifthly, power should be delegated to school boards to fix on an individual basis the remuneration of teachers and their terms and conditions of employment. Sixthly, a national capital fund for development should be created with powers to make long-term loans to schools. Seventhly, the terms of reference of the schools inspectorate should be revised for it to take over the role of specialist advisers as well as to ensure the maintenance of appropriate minimum standards.

The consequence of the introduction of this new system will be, firstly, to introduce more efficient financial management of schools, but, far more importantly, because schools will have to attract pupils in order to fund their activities, they will strive to improve their reputations by delivering better education than their rivals.

Such a system would be more responsive to parental aspirations and would enshrine parental choice. It would lead to higher standards, not just in the few schools but in the many, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert B. Jones, Mr. Michael Forsyth, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Michael Fallon, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Edward Leigh, Dr. Ian Twinn, Mr. Tony Favell, Mr. Alan Howarth and Mr. John Watts.

SCHOOLS SELF-MANAGEMENT

Mr. Robert B. Jones accordingly presented a Bill to reform the system of school financing in England and Wales by re-allocating funds to schools on a per capita basis. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 6 February and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Government Economic Policies

5.3 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): May I repeat Mr. Speaker's appeal for brevity? No fewer than 50 hon. Members hope to speak in this debate. At present the Chair does not have the power to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches because it has not yet been renewed. Hon. Members should restrain themselves and be as brief as possible. Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move,

That this House condemns Government economic policies, which have divided the nation, induced a collapse in the manufacturing base, created mass unemployment, led to a serious loss in world trade and an impending balance of payments crisis, and permitted a destructive merger mania to imperil British manufacturing industry, as typified by the lamentable decision of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry not to refer the BTR bid for Pilkingtons to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and demands that the Government now use all available resources on investment in the people of the United Kingdom, in jobs, in public services, in manufacturing and in training, so that the nation can once more compete effectively and pay its way in the world.

The Government are now embarked on a campaign of calculated deception. It is a campaign of deception about the state of the economy, about the impending crisis and about their own responsibility for bringing it about. The Government's friends in Fleet street are accessories to that fraud. This week *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* all paraded sets of phoney figures, clearly taken down at dictation speed from the Chancellor's spokesman. I propose to give three examples of what those newspapers said and to look at the examples in some detail, leaving aside for a moment their repetition of the old deceits about job creation and reduction in unemployment. The *Daily Express* said:

"The latest retail figures confirm the strength of the consumer boom. In the fourth quarter of 1986 retail sales were 2·5 per cent. up on the previous three months and 7 per cent. up on the previous year."

It did not go on to say that while consumer spending rose by 7 per cent. the production of consumer goods in Britain rose by only 2 per cent. To have added that would have demonstrated not the strength but the weakness of an economy about to slump into a £7·5 billion balance of trade deficit. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish, because the figure of £7·5 billion is the Chancellor's and not mine. *[Interruption.]* I thought he read the statistics about this. *The Daily Telegraph* tells us that manufacturing output was at its highest level since 1980, but did not add that manufacturing output is still 4 per cent. below its 1979 level. Even on the Chancellor's own statistics and estimate, manufacturing output will not be at 1979 general election level by the time of the next general election. To have added such figures would have demonstrated not industry's success but the Government's abject failure.

My third example is from the *Daily Mail*, which tells us that the outlook for exports is bright. It cited motor cars as an example but did not give any figures. It did not add that motor vehicle output fell by 5·1 per cent. in the last recorded year, and that it is now 29 per cent. lower than it was in 1979. If those figures had been given, they would have revealed the damage done to the motor industry by the medium-term financial strategy and by the total absence of any Government industrial strategy.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

The campaign of deceit is as damaging as it is dishonest. In an attempt to create the illusion of success, the Government behave in a way which makes the crisis more certain and brings it nearer. The campaign of deceit is as callous as it is cynical, because in order to pretend in some parts of Britain that Government policies are succeeding, other parts have to suffer, and are suffering, wilful neglect.

No Government this century have so ignored the needs and so damaged the interests of the people whose votes they have already lost. Hence the occasional whine that we hear from Tory Back Benchers in marginal constituencies such as the hon. Members for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) and for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) who know that they, like the areas that they represent, have been written off by the Government.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to comment on a BBC statement last weekend to the effect that since I was elected unemployment in my constituency has fallen by nearly 20 per cent?

Mr. Hattersley: I am almost as pleased to hear that as I am sceptical about the figure. It must be something about the hon. Gentleman's character and personality that makes his constituency a haven of success in a wilderness of Tory failure in the north-east.

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall not give the hon. Gentleman a chance to say something else because I can tell him——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not persist if the right hon. Gentleman does not give way.

Mr. Holt: On a point of order. Is it not the convention that when an hon. Member is attacked he is given a right of reply?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the right hon. Gentleman who has the Floor.

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that we shall hear from the hon. Gentleman and I shall give way to him again just as I did a moment ago. I wonder whether he will want to say anything after he has heard the Government and the Chancellor boast in this debate — having ignored the jobs that have been lost since 1979—about the jobs that have been created since 1983. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has information about the jobs that have been created in Langbaurgh. I can tell the House only about jobs that have been created in the area of which his constituency is a part. Even on the Government's own figures, the north has been scandalously neglected since 1983 in the business of job creation. On the Government's own figures there are 446,000 new jobs in the south-east, but only 135,000 new jobs in Scotland, the north-west, the north, and Yorkshire and Humberside all added together.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) has mentioned the unemployment figures for his constituency. I have just received for this debate the figures for Cleveland county. In the county as a whole the unemployment figure is 20·8 per cent. and in Langbaurgh it is 16·5 per cent. That is considerably higher than in 1983 when the hon. Member for Langbaurgh was elected.

Mr. Hattersley: Since the hon. Member for Langbaurgh has become the fulcrum and the focal point of this debate, I have little doubt that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will wish to call him. If he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, he had better make his peace with his constituents and the statistics.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Member for Langbaurgh must know, as the House knows, that outside the magic triangle of the south-east Britain is short of jobs, public services, and amenities. Even within the south-east, areas which once relied on manufacturing industry — the decaying hearts of old cities in particular—are similarly and savagely affected.

At the same time, 9 million people, or 17 per cent. of the population, now live on or below the poverty line. That is an increase of families living below the poverty line of 47 per cent. since 1979. Against that background the Chancellor has set out his own priorities. I want to quote them to the House. On 5 January he told the *Financial Times* that his aim was to bring our top rate of tax down further. The following day the *Daily Express*, with typical eloquence and originality, copied the story. It described the same facts as "Lawson's dream" and said that his dream was a promised reduction in income tax for big earners. The *Daily Express* went on coyly to reveal that cutting income tax for big earners is part of the Chancellor's election strategy.

Let me tell the Chancellor now that if he wants to fight the next election on tax cuts, he can begin this afternoon by answering some direct questions on the subject, initially concerning his social priorities and the reason he wants to bring about those tax cuts. I ask him directly: why are tax cuts—let us say 2p off the standard rate at a cost of about £3 billion — more important than reopening hospital wards which have been closed because of cuts in the Health Service budget? Why are tax cuts more important than providing nursery school places, textbooks and the 16-plus maintenance allowance? Why are tax cuts more important than revising the housing investment programme, building houses for rent, and reducing the number of homeless families, the number of which has doubled under this Government to 100,000?

Why are tax cuts more important than restoring the link between the pension and average earnings and paying the pensioners the increase of which they have been cheated? Why are tax cuts more important than increasing child benefit and bringing the most effective form of help to the hard-pressed low-income families? Putting aside those social questions, which I know the Chancellor will not even attempt to answer, I ask him about unemployment.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose*——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I want an answer from the Chancellor, not from insignificant Members on the Back Benches.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to address me directly and then not give me a chance of intervening?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that this is a short debate and many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Hattersley: Having asked the Chancellor questions about his social priorities, which I know he will not dare to answer, I want to ask him about unemployment. If he has £3 billion to spare in the next Budget, and if putting Britain back to work is honestly one of the things that he regards as important, why does he not use that £3 billion in the most effective way to secure that objective of lower unemployment? The Treasury's own model confirms that if job creation is to be the objective, public sector capital investment is twice as effective and public sector revenue spending is four times more effective than tax cuts, not least because it does not suck in the imports, about which the Chancellor ought to know something. If there is £3 billion to spare, why do the Government not use it to tackle or improve what their own National Economic Development Council called dilapidated Britain? We need to rebuild our old hospitals, replace decrepit schools, repair and extend our housing stock, extend our road systems and modernise our railways.

Why are not all those objectives, the urgent necessities of jobs, schools, pensions, hospitals and houses, more important than cutting 2p off the standard rate? The answer lies in the Government's well-known belief — indeed as far as the next election is concerned their well-known hope—that nobody with a conscience ever votes Conservative. Tax cuts are the wrong social choice. Nor are they the choice of a nation which wants to see a reduction in unemployment and improved social services. Nor are they the right economic option. Britain now faces a growing balance of payments difficulty. We are simply not paying our way in the world. I doubt whether even the Chancellor, with his well-known record of statistical integrity, will deny the facts on our balance of payments position.

The right hon. Gentleman now admits that the balance of payments will be in deficit by £1·5 billion this year, compared with the £3·6 billion surplus in 1985. Independent forecasters believe that even that admission is over-optimistic. The London Business School says the deficit will be £2·5 billion; Phillips and Drew says it will be £3 billion; the OECD says £3·2 billion, rising to £5·7 billion in two years' time; James Capel says £3·4 billion; the National Institute says £5·8 billion. The Treasury's own forecasts for 1986 have deteriorated from a surplus of £4 billion, which the Chancellor promised us in the autumn statement of 1985, to a surplus of £3·5 billion promised in the Budget debate, to a breakeven promised in the autumn statement of 1986. In March the Chancellor made the silly boast that, thanks to his policies, Britain had survived the reduction in oil prices "unscathed".

The price we have paid is a balance of payments which is now sliding into chronic deficit. The price we have paid

is a sterling which is already in crisis. The pound is being held on a life support system of the highest real interest rates in our history.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) in a moment. If he is not telling me that sterling is kept at acceptable figures only because we have the most damaging and debilitating highest real interest rate in our history and in the industrialised world, perhaps he will tell me why that is so.

Sir William Clark: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Would he not agree that between 1974 and 1979, when his party was in government, each year there was a balance of payments deficit which totalled something like £4 billion over the four years? If one takes the balance of payments, the deficits and the surpluses over the past seven years, it can be seen that in the whole history of this Tory Government there has been a surplus of £23 billion.

Mr. Hattersley: I give the hon. Member for Croydon, South credit for knowing the answer to his own question. Oil is the answer to his question. This Government were washed to power on the prospects of a prosperity greater than anything this country could have anticipated without the oil. But the oil has been squandered. We ran a surplus on our manufacturing balance. Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that in the general election of 1979, when he and other members of his party were promising that if they were elected they would put everything right, he would have conceived for a second that, with the oil revenue now being enjoyed, the balance of payments would be back in deficit this year? Of course he does not believe that. It is back in deficit for the reasons I propose to describe.

Because of the deficit, sterling is being held up at acceptable levels only by a real interest rate which is deeply damaging to the economy. That is not simply the view of the Labour party. It is the view expressed yesterday by the CBI—not especially noted, certainly not this year, for supporting the views on the economy espoused from these Benches. But what it says about manufacturing industry, real interest rates and now what it actually said about tax cuts is a condemnation of the Chancellor's position.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I will put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery.

Mr. Howarth: If the right hon. Gentleman even sets off down the road of embarking on his party's programme of increasing spending by £28 billion, what will happen to real interest rates?

Mr. Hattersley: Even the Chief Secretary is not hawking the £28 billion figure round any longer. He has had a rush of integrity to the head and has abandoned that figure.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): Withdraw.

Mr. Hattersley: It is clearly my duty to withdraw what I said about the rush of integrity.

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman might consider the integrity of his own figures. I have persistently urged him to make clear what he would withdraw from the £28 billion. He will know perfectly well that, although some figures have been withdrawn, others have been added, which certainly make the £28 billion accurate and, if anything, an underestimate. It is up to the right hon. Gentleman to make his figures clear. I am not withdrawing that total until he does so.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chief Secretary asked for an independent assessment. He got one from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The only problem was that it did not give the same answer as he gave. I am prepared to rely on the independent assessment. I do not believe that the Conservative party does itself any good in wanting to run away from the real issues by inventing figures which are now generally accepted outside the 1922 Committee as being wholly spurious and wholly unworthy of examination.

The reason we shall avoid the balance of payments crisis that I have just described is——

Mr. Holt: That the Labour party will not come to office.

Mr. Hattersley: —that we shall concentrate on the real needs and the real economy. The Government have scandalously neglected those areas of the economy for which they do not have an emotional sympathy and a deep political interest. That is why the Government have concentrated so much in their economic management and fiscal strategy on the interests of the City of London and on those who work within it. That is why the Government are so reluctant to act against City fraud. That is why the Government are unwilling to operate an effective system of supervision over the financial institutions. That is why the Government are operating a monopolies and mergers policy which encourages merger mania, with all its waste of efficiency.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: Some surprise has been expressed in the House and outside that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has now come amongst us, is not speaking in the debate, particularly since the motion specifically criticises him for failure to act over the recent proposed merger, abandoned today, but abandoned only after a great deal of time and effort had been wasted in both companies and, most important, after Pilkingtons had been forced to take a number of decisions to protect itself against the merger which are deeply damaging to the long-term interests of that company.

The Prime Minister announced today that the failure to refer the Pilkington bid was a victory for the swift resolution of the matter because, she said, had there been reference, the matter would have dragged on for weeks or possibly months. I give the Prime Minister credit for having said that by mistake, because she must know that the purpose of a tough monopolies and merger policy is to prevent unreasonable predators from making their strike in the first place. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry must know, as I suspect, that a predator went into the Department to find out whether reference was likely. If he had been told that reference was likely, the proposal would have been abandoned two weeks, three weeks or a month ago and the damage that has been done to Pilkingtons would not have arisen.

That being said, and surprised as I am that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should prefer to defend himself to a Back-Bench committee rather than

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here, I do not believe that the personalities in this matter are the most important issue. Support for the City, for its greed, for its obsession with short-term speculation and for its sleazy undercurrent of corruption is the inevitable extension of Tory economic philosophy.

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I have some sympathy with his worries about the uncertainties that the takeover process injects into the management of companies. However, can he explain how a manifesto behind which he will campaign, which threatens the whole of British industry with the spectre of the nationalisation proposals of his party, will improve that position?

Mr. Hattersley: I hope and believe that we shall write into our next manifesto the monopolies and merger policy which the last Labour Government put to the House a few months before their defeat—a tougher monopolies and merger policy than existed at the time, a tougher policy than exists now, and one which the Cabinet of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member scuppered because it was too tough for their friends in the City.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Loughborough) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I have given way a good deal. Mr. Deputy Speaker has asked us to make progress; I still have a great deal to say, so I propose to say it without further interruption.

Clearly, as is demonstrated by the behaviour on the Conservative Benches, there is a great deal of panic within the Government about the monster that the big bang has created. Naturally, the panic about the reputation of the City rubbing off on them has been increased by the news from Morgan Grenfell today. Hence the off-record briefings about seven-year sentences and about Home Office crime squads. Hence the tough talk off the record about how the Government will behave in future.

The truth is that the Tory party cannot act against the City because the City reflects Tory values. As Tory values have deteriorated over the past 20 years the City has reflected that decline. Inevitably, support for the City has been matched by wanton neglect of manufacturing industry. That in its turn has done savage harm to Britain outside London as the interests of the regions and the interests of manufacturing industry are synonymous. We shall not get jobs outside London or in the decaying central areas by increasing the number of currency speculators, stockbrokers, or merchant bankers. We shall not solve any of our problems by changing Britain from the workshop of the world into the home of insider dealing.

What is more, the interests of the regions, of manufacturing and of the balance of trade are all identical. I know very well that the financial sector contributes £7·5 billion a year to our balance of payments but its policies and the policies which support it and which make that possible make it difficult for other sectors of the economy to operate efficiently. Indeed, the City is like an opening batsman, so obsessed with his own average that he does enormous damage to the team in which he plays and prevents the team from winning.

Those policies and the Chancellor's policies have done massive damage to manufacturing industry. Manufacturing trade has moved from a £4·5 billion surplus in 1981 to a Government-estimated deficit of £7·5 billion this year. Manufacturing industry can no longer keep pace with demand for manufactured goods at home. Motor imports increased by 15·5 per cent. between the third quarter of 1985 and the third quarter of 1986, and the import of other consumer goods rose by 19·5 per cent.

Our share of world trade had fallen since 1979 and our share of world manufactured trade has fallen massively by over 24 per cent. Indeed, manufactured output is still 4 per cent. less than in 1979. To be fair and honest, I must admit — *[Interruption]* — that four other countries have a worse record than ours for manufactured output since 1979. Those countries are Fiji, Argentina, Senegal and Barbados. I have nothing to tell the House about the capital expenditure of manufacturing of those four countries. However, even when leasing is included in the calculations, in Britain that figure is 18 per cent. less than in 1979.

The Chancellor will rise in a moment — [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am not surprised that Conservative Members do not like the truth about the economy. However, they should rest assured that they will get the unremitting truth from Opposition Benches, day after day between now and the general election.

We know that there was a bit of an economic spurt a few months ago because we read of it yesterday in the *Daily Mail*. So it must be true. I find it pathetic that there should be so much rejoicing when a brief improvement does nothing more than increase output to 4 per cent. below its 1979 level, especially when it will soon be impossible to sustain even the illusion of economic strength. It cannot be sustained because, as well as facing a collapse in manufacturing and a deterioration in our balance of payments, we are now caught in the biggest credit explosion in our history.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that the Chancellor will not deny the facts because they were given by the Governor of the Bank of England; they are not mine. Those facts reveal that Britain is being run like a pawnshop. Personal indebtedness increases at the rate of 20 per cent. per year. Personal credit now stands at almost twice the level to which it rose during the ill-fated Barber boom—a part of history that I thought had been removed from Conservative archives. Indeed, we may have the rehabilitation of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), if we are to emulate the policies that preceded the 1974 general election, which in no small part resulted in the defeat of the Conservative Government, because it was realised then, as it will be realised now, that a consumer boom is a spurious indication of a nation's success. The present consumer boom is almost twice as high as the Barber boom of 1974.

In such a situation it would be criminally stupid to encourage increases in credit, suck in more imports and worsen the balance of payments by tax cuts. Therefore, as I know that the Chancellor will not explain his social reasons for cutting taxes, I ask him to explain the economic justification for making the tax cuts that I have no doubt will come about.

I hope that we shall be spared the hypocritical nonsense about lower tax rates yielding higher tax revenues. The increased revenues collected from the higher tax bracket

are not the result of harder work encouraged by lower marginal rates. They are the product of the widening divergence between the primary earnings of the rich and the primary earnings of the rest. It was not lower marginal tax rates that encouraged the chairmen of recently privatised industries to double their salaries the moment that they left the public sector. It was not tax cuts that produced those City salaries which the Chancellor described as looking like telephone numbers. To justify tax cuts as a way of making the rich pay more is greed dressed up to look like benevolence.

If the Chancellor disputes that judgment—I have no doubt that he will——

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): I shall certainly dispute it.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman has said that he will certainly dispute it, so I offer him the chance to prove me wrong. He has in his possession the Brown report on tax rates and their incentive effect. He has suppressed that report because it is not convenient to his case and it proves him wrong.

Mr. Lawson: I advise the right hon. Gentleman that that document, which originates from a commission during the period of office of the Labour Government and which he alleges that I have suppressed, has been in the Library of the House of Commons for over a month.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman knows that it is not in its full and complete form and that in its full and complete form it will prove me right and him wrong.

Mr. Lawson: What is wrong with it?

Mr. Hattersley: What is wrong with it not being in its full and complete form is that, in its full form, it proves me right and him wrong. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

The Government do not have to act on unemployment because it is now beginning a genuine decline. The excuse given is that the Government have created jobs at such a rate that no change of policy is necessary. However, the truth is that we have lost a million jobs in this country since the Tory Government were elected. Recent claims about reductions in the number of people unemployed are largely the result of increases in the so-called schemes and measures.

There are 46,000 young people on youth training schemes and 55,000 people on unemployment schemes. None of those people is doing the real job that the Prime Minister promised in 1979. Few of them are doing real training to improve the skills of our work force which are desperately needed. Some of them, as illustrated last Thursday on the "This Week" programme on television that examined youth training schemes that were nominated for such examination by the Government, are carrying out tasks that are so inappropriate to modern industrial needs that they humiliate the participants and shame the Government who descend to such deceit to reduce unemployment .

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: We no longer have a thread of coherent and consistent policy from the Government. Instead we have cosmetics. We do not have a constant thread of industrial or fiscal policy from the Government. We have cosmetics. That is why, after seven years of boasting about public expenditure cuts — admittedly calculating the numbers in different ways according to the Chancellor's convenience—we now have a year of public expenditure increases.

I should like to ask the Chancellor another question, still vainly believing that he might attempt some sensible answers. If the public expenditure increases are right this year, why were they wrong last year and why will they be wrong again next year? What is so special about this year apart from the fact that there will be a general election? That is why we shall have tax cuts, which are socially and economically wrong and unsustainable.

I must advise the Chancellor of something that he already knows: whichever party wins the general election, the tax cuts that he makes in this Budget will be reversed. I make it absolutely clear that we shall vote against tax cuts and that when we are elected we shall restore the level of taxation to approximately what it is now.

Mr. Forman *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: That is the truth about both parties.

However, as well as making tax cuts, the Tory party will make deep cuts in public expenditure. It is planning them now. The White Paper that was published two weeks ago reveals that the Government plan to cut public expenditure on the capital account. The difference between the parties on tax cuts and what follows is the Labour party's willingness to face the facts and the Conservative party's refusal to tell the truth.

Mr. Forman *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: The Tory slogan for the next election is, "Vote now, pay later". We know how the Chancellor will react to this sudden exposure to the truth. In a moment there will be long passages of bogus statistics, rather like those that I quoted at the beginning of my speech. *[Laughter.]* There will be passages of ritual abuse and the insistence that everything is for the best in the best of all free enterprise worlds. The Chancellor will ask the people to believe him when he says that, if he cuts taxes, he will not increase them again. Every Conservative Government in the recent past have been prepared to deceive the people over taxation.

The Government came to power in 1979 committed to cutting overall taxes and they repeated that promise four years later. Our total annual tax bill is now £29 billion higher than it was on the day when the Labour party left office. In 1955, a Conservative Government, who were in much the same position as the present Government, cut taxes within a few weeks of a general election and reimposed them a few weeks after the election.

If the House wants a more up-to-date example I shall gladly give it one. During the general election campaign in 1979 Labour Members warned that, once elected, the Conservative Government would double VAT. "Double VAT" was exactly the phrase that I used at a press conference at Transport house. The present Foreign Secretary could not have been more explicit in his denial. At Conservative Central Office on 21 April 1979 he said:

"We have absolutely no intention of doubling VAT."

The *Daily Mail*, which tomorrow will undoubtedly dismiss any chants of crisis, listed the allegation that the Tory party would double VAT as a Labour lie. Within three weeks of the election, VAT was increased from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent.

The truth is that the Tory party has never been trusted over its taxation proposals when a general election has

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been in the air. Conservatives cheated the country in 1979 and I have no doubt that given the chance they will do so again. Fortunately, that chance will be denied them.

5.42 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the success of its economic policies which have led to six years of healthy, balanced economic growth, have brought inflation down to its lowest levels for nearly two decades, have enabled industry to become more profitable than at any time since 1964, have brought the fastest productivity growth among major European countries since 1979 and have fostered the conditions in which a million new jobs have been created throughout the country since 1983.".

This is not only the first economic debate of 1987; it is also the first since the tragically premature death of the Liberal party's economic spokesman, David Penhaligon. His breezy, good humoured, but always thoughtful contributions to our debates will be greatly missed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] No hon. Member was more widely liked.

I turn now to the speech of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). The fact that he has to resort to predictions of bad times just around the corner—I shall examine that proposition in a moment—is eloquent testimony that even the right hon. Gentleman in his heart of hearts at last recognises how well the economy is doing now.

We are now in our sixth successive year of steady growth, and still going strong. Year in, year out, we have been averaging getting on for 3 per cent. growth a year. Indeed, since the last election, ours has been the fastest growing major economy in the European Community; in sharp contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, when we were falling ever further behind.

We have achieved this while getting inflation down and keeping it down — a combination unknown for a generation. Inflation last year, at 3½ per cent., was the lowest for almost 20 years, and although this year it will be slightly higher than that, it will still be far lower than anything the last Labour Government even so much as aspired to, let alone attained.

Moreover, the growth that we have seen and that we shall continue to see has been balanced between consumption and investment. Indeed, for the whole of the period since the upswing began — *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should listen to the truth. During the whole of the period since the upswing began, while consumer spending has risen at an average of 3 per cent. per year, investment has risen at 4 per cent. a year — twice as fast as the European Community average. By contrast, under the Labour Government's brief upswing from 1975 to 1979, consumer spending grew twice as fast as investment. So much for the right hon. Gentleman's strictures about the balance between consumption and investment under this Government.

When we first took office in 1979, inflation was in double figures and accelerating fast. Not only have we brought it down dramatically, but our relative performance, although still not good enough, has markedly improved. Under Labour, the United Kingdom's inflation averaged seven percentage points more than in the world's seven major industrialised nations as a whole. During the whole of our term of office so far, the inflation gap has been reduced to two percentage points.

Mr. Hattersley: Could we now have the proper comparison—the percentage difference between Labour and Europe and the percentage difference between this Government's inflation record and the European record?

Mr. Lawson: The comparison that I gave is the correct comparison, accepted by all the international economic bodies.

Or look at that other perennial British weakness of the past—our persistently low growth of productivity, which compared so badly with that of our major competitors. Here, too, the picture has been transformed, with productivity since 1979 growing faster in Britain than in any of our major competitors with the solitary exception of Japan.

Inevitably, in the short term, this sharp improvement in productivity, although badly needed — this was recognised on all sides of the political divide at the time —meant fewer jobs. But that phase is now behind us. During the present Parliament, the number of jobs has risen steadily, quarter by quarter, without a break—the best performance for almost 30 years. Altogether the number of jobs has grown since 1983 by more than a million—a bigger increase than in the whole of the rest of the European Community put together. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] It is now clear from the latest figures that unemployment—I hope that Opposition Members will listen to this because they profess to care about unemployment—is now on a steady downward trend— [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] — something which the whole House will welcome.

What of exports and the external position of the British economy? Since the upswing began, while most of Europe has seen its share of the world markets decline, ours has held steady and exports continue to rise fast. As for the external position as a whole, this is now the strongest that we have known at any time since the war. Our net overseas assets are second only to those of Japan—a far cry from the relative pittance the present Government inherited in 1979.

It is against that background that we have to assess the fact, which assumed such momentous proportions in the speech that we have just heard from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, that our balance of payments is now in deficit on current account. Once again, the contrast with the Labour years is instructive. During the whole of Labour's period of office there was a cumulative deficit on current account which is now put at some £5 billion. During the first seven years of the present Conservative Government, we were continuously in surplus, to a cumulative total of £21 billion. *[Interruption.]* Those are the facts.

Since then, the collapse of the oil price has for the time being pushed us into deficit, but that was only to be expected. It is clearly arithmetically impossible for every economy in the world to be in surplus every year, even though it is not necessary to be in deficit four years out of five, as the Labour party was when it was in office.

What matters is that we should keep control of our domestic costs, so that the exchange rate adjustment which has followed the oil price collapse and which is now completed will lead in time to a compensating

improvement on our non-oil account, both visible and invisible. In this context, the most recent figures for the growth in the United Kingdom's unit labour costs are most encouraging.

Of course, good news for the British economy is clearly bad news for Labour. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is determined that there is a disaster in the offing. The trouble is that we have heard his predictions before.

In May 1983, he confidently predicted that inflation would rocket after the election and within a year would be in double figures. That is what he said. The outcome was that a year later inflation was 5 per cent. Of course, it has since fallen further still. That was Old Roy's prediction for 1983.

He was at it again at the end of 1984, warning that over the next 12 months we faced what he described as a "slump" — I quote his very word, that is what he forecast. The outcome was that in 1985 we grew faster than any other country in Europe.

He was at it again in 1985, confidently predicting lower living standards. That is what he was predicting then. The outcome was that living standards rose to record levels and they are still rising. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman is complaining that they are rising too fast.

Now, of course, the right hon. Gentleman is predicting an economic crisis. No wonder share prices have risen sharply since the latest gipsy's warning first hit the Reuter screens. The markets have learned from long experience the precise value of the right hon. Gentleman's predictions of gloom and doom.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lawson: The plain fact is that, leaving aside the risk of a world economic crisis, which did not appear to be what the right hon. Gentleman had in mind, the only thing that could precipitate an economic crisis in Britain would be the election of the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to office.

Ms. Clare Short: I am grateful to the Chancellor for giving way. He has put his finger on the spot and he has shown the division between the view on Conservative Benches and that on Opposition Benches about what is a healthy economy. The Chancellor's view of a healthy economy is governed by share prices, ours by jobs for people and long-term wealth for the economy.

Mr. Lawson: I have already mentioned jobs. That is something which this side of the House attaches great importance to. I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome the fact that there are now over 1 million more people in work in this country than there were at the time of the last general election.

Of course, economic crisis is what we always associate with the Labour party. That is what occurred when the Labour party was last in office. It is instructive, as we have just published our public expenditure White Paper which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will be opening a debate about in due course in the House, to look back at Labour's public expenditure White Paper of 1977, published exactly 10 years ago this month.

The conduct of economic policy, as the House will recall, had by then been handed over to the International Monetary Fund to which the Labour Government had had to go, cap in hand, the previous September, as they became engulfed in the worst economic crisis since the war. The balance of payments 10 years ago this month was in deficit. Inflation stood at 16½ per cent. Productivity growth, according to the White Paper, was barely two thirds of the average for the major OECD countries. Strikes were rife. The public sector borrowing requirement had been allowed to rise to the equivalent, in today's terms, of £35 billion. To recover from this, the White Paper announced plans to cut public expenditure by the equivalent, in today's terms, of £4 billion. Not only were the cuts savage, but they were concentrated heavily, if not exclusively, on capital spending.

From its inception in 1974 to the IMF crisis of 1976, the Labour Government had boosted current public expenditure by a staggering 17 per cent. in real terms. When they were forced to cut, the Labour Government found themselves unable to undo the current spending spree they had unleashed, and savaged capital spending instead.

As a result, during the whole of their time in office, public sector capital spending fell by 25 per cent., with capital spending on the Health Service slashed by more than 30 per cent. and on major roads by almost 35 per cent. That was the inheritance of devastation that we had to make good — as we have been, with spending on major roads up 30 per cent. and on hospitals up by 31 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): What about housing?

Mr. Lawson: Since the Leader of the Opposition mentions housing, I will add that spending on housing renovation is up by over 50 per cent.

So much for the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook's cant about the public sector capital stock which his Government ran down and which we have been seeking to rebuild.

However, I have to concede that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was on stronger ground when he spoke about the differences in prosperity in different parts of the country. For there are undoubtedly regional and local variations, just as there always have been and just as there are in other industrial countries. One clear reason for this is the pattern of industry that history has left us. It is not a simple matter of north versus south. There are prosperous parts of the north just as there are areas of dereliction in the south — and I speak as a midlands Member which, according to the Labour party definition, places me in the north.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lawson: But, in general, jobs have been hardest hit wherever the local or regional economy was most heavily dependent on traditional manufacturing industry — not because all such industry is in decline, although some is.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Chancellor give way now?

Mr. Lawson: In a moment. But even those manufacturing industries not in decline have expanded their output while reducing the number of workers employed. In general, traditional manufacturing industry tended to locate itself in the midlands and the north. If the problem has been more acute in Britain than in most other

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countries, that is only because, thanks to Labour policies, our manufacturing industry was the most heavily overmanned to start with.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the shift in the industrial pattern of development which the Chancellor has described with some accuracy explain the fact that since 1979 our trade in high-tech products has moved from a surplus of £1 billion to a deficit of £2 billion under this Government?

Mr. Lawson: The matter that I am talking about has nothing to do with our trade in high tech. Our exports of high tech have been increasing very substantially.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Give way.

Mr. Lawson: I have given way once. I will give way again but not now.

The difference to which I have alluded is also an inner-city problem and once again most of the big industrial cities are in the north. This Government have taken a whole battery of measures to help those parts of the country that have suffered from the highest levels of unemployment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Give way now.

Mr. Lawson: I will finish this passage first.

Regional assistance, although reduced in overall size, has been much more closely targeted on jobs. We have multiplied spending on top of that on specific employment and training measures tenfold and this massive expenditure has in practice been heavily skewed towards the north. We have also greatly expanded urban developmnt grant spending, where each £1 of public money has levered in £4 of private sector financing. My right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General, when he winds up, will mention some of the other initiatives that we have taken.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Chancellor aware that, in the words of the Confederation of British Industry, one of the biggest impediments to regional growth is the two-month moratorium that has been introduced on the payment of regional development grants? Is he further aware that people in industry all over the country are complaining, and that that moratorium is having a devastating effect on regions such as mine in Cumbria? Will he get together with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and reconsider the matter, rescind it and ensure that development takes place and that the grants are paid when they should be paid?

Mr. Lawson: If the hon. Gentleman had looked at the White Paper published earlier this month, he would have seen that provision for regional expenditure had been increased. There is an obstacle that we have come up against time after time. That has been the behaviour of hard Left Labour local authorities.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North) *rose——*

Mr. Lawson: I have just given way.

As Robert Kilroy-Silk — a name known to Opposition Members—said in his latest book:

"The Militants and their ilk in Liverpool are the biggest deterrents to job creation on Merseyside that there have ever been."

The same goes for other anti-business Socialist local authorities up and down the country. Time after time that is the problem.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose——*

Mr. Lawson: Although manufacturing output overall is rising strongly, the decline in employment in the traditional manufacturing industries is unlikely to reverse itself fully, and to the extent that it does, there is likely to be a constant drift from the cities to the outlying areas. How, then, to attract new firms and industries — manufacturing as well as service industries—to fill the gap? Certainly not with councils such as that of Liverpool. Nor is that the only one.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman must have misheard my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). He asked the specific question, why a moratorium and how can he justify it? Will he answer that now?

Mr. Lawson: It is not a moratorium. It is a delay in payment that allows a significant increase in regional assistance over what was previously planned. That is clearly stated in the White Paper.

I say this in all sincerity to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and Opposition Members: it does not help to imply, as the Opposition all too often do, that the whole of the north is a disaster area, a picture of industrial devastation. That is just the sort of image that does the most damage to the north and, of course, it is not true either. The revival of the hard-hit regions of our country will come about only on the basis of enterprise, whether local or coming in from outside. The Government's task is to create, so far as local government allows us to, the climate for enterprise of that kind.

Mr. Wareing: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of a survey that was recently carried out for the Institute of Directors? The members of the institute were asked which of 11 different factors they thought were the cause of lack of investment and whether they were relevant to business locational decisions. Local authority rates appeared to be the eighth factor among the 11. Most of the problems were related to locational factors, having no bearing whatsoever on the activities of local authorities. That includes Liverpool, where some people, including the Government, think the rates have been kept too low. That is why councils are currently facing the law.

Mr. Lawson: I regret having given way, because that was more of a speech than an intervention. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that business men, particularly small business men, are indifferent to the level of local authority rates, he is not living in the real world. He is even more living in cloud cuckoo land if he thinks that the only anti-business practice of some Labour local authorities—not all—is high rates. There are many other impediments that they put in the way of business, including the refusal of planning permission and so on.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will have heard the Chancellor make a statement about the controls on regional development grant not being a moratorium. May I refer you to page 93 of the White Paper, which the Chancellor said that I had not seen? That page refers specifically to moratoria——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that that is a matter for debate, not a point of order.

Mr. Lawson: I am well aware of what is in volume II of the White Paper and I stand entirely by what I said.

Fortunately, all the signs are that employment prospects have improved considerably in the north as well as in the south, as the economy surges forward.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend said that there were other habits and actions of Socialists that caused problems with employment. Has my right hon. Friend seen the document from the Library that sets out the level of unemployment by constituency? Is he aware that there is a close correlation between high levels of unemployment and Socialism? For example, in London the 11 constituencies with the highest levels of unemployment all have Labour Members of Parliament and they all have Socialist local authorities. Is it not the case that the main creative force behind unemployment is Socialism?

Mr. Lawson: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a telling point.

My own local paper, the *Leicester Mercury*, which I was looking at on Thursday, carried 17 pages of job advertisements. That is substantially up on a year ago. I had some inquiries made——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Get back to the moratorium.

Mr. Lawson: I am talking about jobs, which the hon. Gentleman professes to be concerned about — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman clearly does not care about jobs.

I had inquiries made of some other leading provincial newspapers. Job advertising in the *Manchester Evening News* last week was 11 per cent. up on a year ago. For the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* the increase was around 30 per cent. For the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, there was a rise of 40 per cent. in jobs advertised, and from the *Sheffield Star*, an estimated 50 per cent. increase in the number of jobs advertised compared with a year ago.

Lastly, in this context, given the terms of the Opposition's motion, let me add that there is no evidence whatever that industrial mergers have any responsibility for regional and local differences in employment. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred briefly to the BTR bid for Pilkington. I understand that it must be galling for him to find that his fox has been shot. The plain fact is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry correctly accepted the clear advice of the Director General of Fair Trading that the proposed merger did not raise significant competition issues. BTR's withdrawal from the bid this afternoon in the light of Pilkington's dramatically improved profit forecast is equally clear vindication of the Government's view that other issues are generally best left to the verdict of the market.

As for "merger mania" — I quote from the motion tabled by the Opposition — I pause merely to observe that in the 1960s that was precisely the declared industrial policy of the Labour Government through the agency of the so-called Industrial Reorganisation Corporation.

Mr. Robert C. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: I must get on with my speech.

I turn now to the City, because the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred to the City at some length in his speech. While employment in manufacturing has been declining, in the service industries it has been steadily growing, and nowhere more so than in the financial services industry. Over the past five years, the numbers employed in the financial services industry have been growing at the rate of 5 per cent. a year, to reach 2¼ million at the latest count. The contribution of the financial sector to Britain's invisible trade surplus is now running at some £7½ billion a year.

By no means all of that is concentrated in London. Edinburgh, for example, is a major financial centre in its own right, and Scotland now employs more people in the financial services industry than in steel, coal mining and shipbuilding put together. But there is no doubt that it is London that is the pre-eminent financial centre, not merely of the United Kingdom but of Europe and, arguably, of the world.

To maintain that position, it is essential that London zealously preserves its worldwide reputation for integrity and probity, and we have taken effective steps to that end. Soon after taking office, we legislated to make insider trading illegal, which it never was under Labour, and we are now giving urgent consideration to making it an arrestable offence.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: I shall give way in a moment.

Following the report of the Roskill committee, we are strengthening our armoury against financial fraud, with the setting up of a new serious fraud office, changes in court procedures to make it easier to bring charges and to present evidence, and increases in the penalties for fraud and corruption, all with precious little help, I have to say, from the Opposition.

Mr. John Smith: Before the Chancellor's imperfect recollection leads him into greater error, let me remind him that in 1978, as Secretary of State for Trade, I introduced a Companies Bill that made insider trading a criminal offence. If we had had co-operation from the Conservative Opposition at the time, the Bill would have been on the statute book before the 1979 general election. The Companies Act 1980 followed the provisions that the Labour Bill introduced to the House of Commons. Will the Chancellor now withdraw what he said?

Mr. Lawson: I shall withdraw nothing. As the right hon. and learned Member has owned up, the last Labour Government had a deathbed repentance. Right at the end of their term of office, they suddenly got around to the question of insider trading. They were never able to get it on the statute book during their period in office — *[Interruption.]*

Of course, we have also put on the statute book the new Financial Services Act to ensure the effective regulation of the securities industry. How this will work out in practice it is still too soon to give a final verdict. Many aspects of the Act are not yet in operation. However, let no one be under any illusion that there is anything soft about the regime that it introduces. Although built on the foundation of the City's traditional pattern of self-regulation, it is a fully statutory system, and one which, incidentally, gives inspectors appointed by the Department of Trade and Industry far more power than is possessed by the SEC in America. That is a fact.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lawson: If the hon. Gentleman is an expert on this subject, certainly.

Mr. Rogers: Before the Chancellor concludes his remarks, will he give the House details of the number of inspectors who look for or follow up allegations of fraud in the City of London, compared with the number of inspectors who look for social security fraud?

Mr. Lawson: If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence or suspicion of fraud, will he please give it either to me or to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and appropriate action will be taken. If the hon. Gentleman has no such evidence, he should not pretend that there is anything going on there.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: I shall not give way.

I give the House this assurance: the Government are determined to act promptly and effectively whenever such action is warranted, and this has been amply demonstrated by the decision to put DTI inspectors into Guinness, and by the developments that have already occurred as a result. I give the House a further assurance: should the Guinness inspectors at any time uncover any evidence that would warrant a criminal prosecution, that evidence will be passed on to the appropriate authorities, irrespective of whether the inspectors have completed their own inquiries.

Attention has also, inevitably, been directed to Morgan Grenfell, Guinness's financial advisers. As a bank, Morgan Grenfell is subject to the supervisory authority of the Bank of England and to the terms of the Banking Act.

The Bank of England was closely involved in setting up and determining the terms of reference of the high-level internal inquiry into the management of Morgan Grenfell, which was announced last week and, at the governor's suggestion, the inquiry team is now to be strengthened by the addition of a senior independent auditor. The group chief executive of Morgan Grenfell and the director at the head of its corporate finance division have today announced their resignations, and an executive committee of the board will manage the group pending the appointment of replacements. Meanwhile, the governor of the Bank of England has asked for an interim report by the end of this month, in the light of which the Bank of England will decide whether further action is required.

Any information suggesting criminal activity will, of course, be passed promptly to the appropriate authorities. In particular, the Bank of England is keeping both me and the Department of Trade and Industry fully informed.

Ours is the party of law and order, and this Government are determined to do all in their power to prevent, to detect and to punish wrongdoing, wherever it may occur.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Chancellor care to tell the House when was the last time, before the Government came to office, riots occurred in the inner-city streets?

Mr. Lawson: I regret that there are many occasions of riots in our long history, but I am glad to say that none is taking place at present.

But it is important that, serious though the matter of City wrongdoing is, we keep it in perspective. As the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) at least has conceded, the guilty are a tiny minority. The overwhelming majority of those who work in the City are honest and are as eager to root out the wrongdoers and their practices as anyone in this House.

The attempt by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to smear the entire City with guilt by association, describing it as "sleazy", "seedy", "an alien force" and "the least reputable sector of the economy" is wholly false and insofar as anyone believes him—which may not be many—highly damaging to this country, for which the City's reputation is a priceless national asset. Indeed, if the truth be told, it is the very success of the City in the world market that the Labour party cannot abide. For Labour is comfortable only with failure. Indeed, Labour Members understand nothing else. They knew nothing else but failure when they were last in office, and would condemn our country to even greater failure were they ever to return to office.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Of course we are pleased with the successes in the City of London. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, without the Ivan Boesky affair, and without the SEC in the United States, it is doubtful whether any of these allegations would have been made, let alone the facts discovered?

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman should have the courage to concede—he knows more than his colleagues on the Labour Front Bench—that we have acted promptly and effectively in each of these cases and in every case that has come to light.

What is the Opposition's economic prescription? The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has, I concede, by his standards been relatively honest and open about it. It is higher Government spending, higher borrowing and higher taxes. He has made that plain.

Let me take each of them in turn—first, spending. How much higher spending, and how is it to be financed? As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has once again today pointed out, Labour's spending pledges add up to at least an extra £28 billion a year. How on earth do they imagine that they are going to finance that? I know that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook tries to slide away from the £28 billion, by talking as he did today—or he has on previous occasions at any rate—of Labour's £3½ billion poverty package and £6 billion jobs package. Does that then mean that he is resiling from Labour's repeated promises to spend more on education, more on the Health Service, and more on overseas aid, to name but three? Will he answer? I will gladly give way to the right hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Gentleman is struck dumb. He is not able to answer. Hon. Members will draw their own conclusion that the £28 billion still stands.

Let us give the right hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt. Let us suppose that he is resiling from all these pledges on health, education, overseas aid and the rest because they do not come in either the jobs package or the poverty package. Let us suppose that he is resiling from them and many others. I remind the House that to pay for the £28 billion of additional public spending——

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman does not like this. It would mean a basic rate of income tax of 53p in the pound.

Let us suppose that the right hon. Gentleman has won his desperate battles with his pledge-happy colleagues. How is the £9½ billion to be financed?

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: In a moment. Some £3½ billion of it, we are told, will be financed by reversing the reductions that the Government have allegedly made in the taxation of the higher paid and the rest by an extra £6 billion of Government borrowing. It beggars belief. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook claims that the economy is overheating, that interest rates are too high and that there is a crisis round the corner, and he blithely proposes to borrow an extra £6 billion.

Mr. Hattersley: On this exact question, I spent, I think, the first quarter of an hour of my speech telling the Chancellor that we believed that if he had £3 billion to spend it would be better spent on education, health, pensions and housing than on tax cuts. I ask him to tell the House why he thought that tax cuts were a better choice than health, education, pensions and housing. That is the issue. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain the answer now?

Mr. Lawson: The point is the one I put to the right hon. Gentleman.

It is not even as if the so-called poverty and jobs packages consisted exclusively of capital spending. At least three quarters of the proposed total would be on current spending. So why does not the right hon. Gentleman take the honest course and admit that every penny of it would have to be raised by higher taxation on ordinary working people? Why does he not admit that? Is not the whole of the Opposition's case, which we heard again today, that public expenditure is in every way preferable to private expenditure and that the burden of taxation is of no consequence? Is that not their proposition? Why not at least have the virtue of consistency and promise to restore the basic rate of income tax from the present level of 29p to the 33p which we inherited from Labour? I wonder why the right hon. Gentleman does not promise that.

Apparently, as far as the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to go, at least until now, to promise, in the spirit, he says, of Mr. Walter Mondale, to undo any tax reduction that there may be in this year's Budget. I do not know whether there will be any tax reductions in this year's Budget. All I shall say is that the Budget this year will be on St. Patrick's day. *[Interruption.]* That is informing the House of the date of the Budget.

But the whole country must now be clear about the difference both in policy and in philosophy between the Government and the Opposition. The Government believe in reducing the burden of income tax on ordinary working people and the Opposition believe in increasing it.

As for Mr. Mondale, I can do no better than quote from the leading article in *The Guardian*—not a newspaper that supports the Conservative party. The article states:

"Mr. Walter Mondale, with energy and some honesty, based his entire 1984 American Presidential strategy on playing the spectre at the economic feast. He won only Minnesota. His candidature was a fiasco. The voters did not want to hear about the bad times that might follow the good times. They did not want to vote themselves immediate tax increases. Nor, if times were indeed going to turn sour, did they think that big spending Democrats were the natural first port of call. Mr. Mondale may have made a sincere pitch. But it was not, when the campaign actually got going, an effective or resonant pitch. It was a disaster."

The Labour party is, indeed, a disaster. The only bigger disaster would be a Labour Government.

I welcome this debate. It has been rather a long time coming. The Opposition emerged from their Bishop's Stortford conclave claiming, to quote the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock):

"The Election will be about the economy. Our campaign from now until election day will therefore be about this central issue."

Excellent — but what happened? They fell at the first fence last Wednesday, not because of cold weather but because of cold feet. Since then, all we have had are further figures showing that the economy is in excellent shape. The prospects for 1987 are very good and I invite the House to reject the Opposition's absurd motion with the contempt that it deserves.

6.25 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The Conservative party has been in office since 1979. We are entitled to judge its record on the basis of what has happened not since 1981 or 1983 but since 1979. Just as the Chancellor is happy to fight the general election on the Government's economic record, so, too, is the alliance. The central feature of economic policy and the central failure of the Government's policies is unemployment.

Since 1979, the number of long-term unemployed has increased fourfold from 300,000 to 1·36 million. I hope that during this debate we will not become too embroiled in percentages and big figures but will consider the implications of those figures. That is why I chose to start with the figure for long-term unemployment of about 1·3 million. In my constituency and in the rest of the north that means a very large number of families who have been suffering considerable deprivation, hardship and misery for a very long time. If the Chancellor is proud of his economic record and of recent economic events, he should spend a little more time not only in the northern region but in other parts of the country that have been hit by the scourge of unemployment in an unprecedented way since the Conservative party came to office.

On the basis of the way in which unemployment was calculated previously, there are at present some 3·7 million people unemployed. The Chancellor should remember that any comparisons that he wishes to draw to the attention of the House should be on that basis, unless he is prepared to reduce the old figures to compensate for the changes made by his Administration.

The long-term unemployed figures are higher than during the 1930s depression. There were some 483,000 long-term unemployed in 1933. By 1939 the number had been halved. It is an appalling fact that the Government have not merely matched the levels of unemployment in the 1930s but have beaten those levels time and time again.

We have heard much from Conservative Members about the number of new jobs created. The Chancellor, along with many of his supporters, has been preaching about the million new jobs which are supposed to have been created in recent years, but let us consider the actual record. There are now 1·6 million fewer jobs than in 1979 when the Conservative party came to office. Let us consider a different figure from the Government propaganda claim that about a million new jobs have been created in the past three years. According to the Bank of England, the number of full-time equivalent new jobs created in the past three years is only about 239,000. That

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contrasts vividly with the constant stream of propaganda —that is what it is—that we get from the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and other Ministers. For the benefit of the Chancellor, I repeat the Bank of England figure— 239,000 full-time equivalent new jobs in the past three years. That is merely scratching the surface of the problem. —[*Interruption.*] I do not care if that figure has been revised by a minor amount, the fact remains that the figure given by the Chancellor and his colleagues is deliberately and grossly misleading. There are now 1·6 million fewer jobs in Britain than when the Conservative party took office.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the steep rise in part-time employment considerably masks the failure of the Government's employment policies?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. When the Government boast about all those new jobs they are really talking about a whole range of part-time jobs. For the unemployed and the long-term unemployed such jobs are meaningless. That is why I have referred to the Bank of England figure of 239,000 full-time equivalent jobs. That is the true record of the Government's job creation programme since they came to office.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): This is all very interesting but the House would be interested to know whether the hon. Gentleman is still committed to what he told fellow alliance Members— that they should spend £10 billion. Surely that would mean an income tax rate of 38p in the pound and a VAT rate of 26 per cent. How would that help job creation?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I will come to our proposals shortly, but the hon. Gentleman must get his facts right. The sum of £10 billion would be spent over our period in government, not in one year as the hon. Gentleman seeks to imply.

Let us consider manufacturing output——

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: No, I cannot give way. Mr. Speaker has implored us to be brief because other hon. Members wish to speak.

We have heard the Government's boasts about the growth of the economy in recent years. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) referred to the fact that the Chancellor had trumpeted about levels of production getting back to 1980 levels. What an incredible thing to boast about — getting production levels back to the figure reached the year after they came to office. What an achievement!

The decline in manufacturing output is the cause of our economic problems. Production levels are still 6 per cent. below 1979 levels. We have made absolutely no progress —we have gone backwards. In the eight years since the Conservatives took office we have still not reached the levels of production in the manufacturing industries that existed in 1979. We are still struggling to get back to the 1979 levels. Goodness me — even with the three-day week the manufacturing sector did better than it has done since the Government took office.

We have heard a great deal about the reason for the decline. We are told that the international economic situation has led to Britain and other countries to be hit in exactly the same way—what poppycock! It is simply not true that manufacturing employment in other countries has been so hard hit. Since the Conservative Government took office we have lost 28 per cent. of the work force in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: No, I will not give way. Almost 30 per cent. of the work force in manufacturing industry has gone.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester) *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: No, I will not give way.

Let us consider comparisons with other countries. In Japan there has been a 4·9 per cent. increase in manufacturing employment. In the United States there has been a drop of 2 per cent., in Canada 1·4 per cent., in West Germany 8·5 per cent. and in Italy 9·4 per cent. Incidentally, Italy has now overtaken Britain in terms of wealth per head of population, so in comparison with the original Common Market countries we are last in the league table. Our manufacturing employment is down by 28 per cent. and the worst comparison that we can draw is the 9·4 per cent. drop experienced in Italy. Britain's declining manufacturing industry is a direct consequence of the Government's policies.

It is no good the Chancellor trying to tell the House that the decline is due to our industries not performing as well as those of other countries. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about steel?"] In 1979 Britain produced 21·5 million tonnes of steel. Now, after seven years, the magnificient achievement of that industry is a total tonnage of 15 million. That is an illustration of the state of the economy and of our manufacturing industries. We are producing six million tonnes less than we did in 1979.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Holt: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is discussing steel because this morning I went to Steel House to discuss this matter with some senior executives. In my constituency in the north-east and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Redcar (Mr. Tinn) there are 50 per cent. fewer employees than six years ago but the steel industry there is producing 120 per cent. more steel than in the past.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: We have heard all the boasts from the Chancellor and other Ministers about how the economy has picked up, but if we consider the production of bricks, steel and raw materials that go to make up the true economy we find that we are well behind the production figures that prevailed in 1979.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. Wrigglesworth: No, I will not give way.

Such a decline in production has implications for my region and the whole question of the north-side divide. This row has been hovering about for a number of years, but it really began with the publication of the Department of Employment census showing that 94 per cent. of total job losses had occurred in Scotland, the north, the

midlands, Wales and Northern Ireland. It would be nonsense to suggest that unemployment is a problem only in the north and not in the south. Some areas in the south have been equally hard hit, just as some areas in the north, even in my constituency, are as prosperous in terms of income and housing as some areas in the south.

Nevertheless, overwhelmingly more people are unemployed in the north because the economy of the north has been dominated by old manufacturing industries which have been slipping into decline over a long period. That decline has been accelerated dramatically by Government policies. An inevitable consequence of Government policies and of the decline in our manufacturing base has been that the major manufacturing areas of Britain have been the hardest hit and have paid the price for the Government's policies.

If Conservative Members do not accept that that situation is a consequence of their policies, I refer them to the period when the right hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Sir K. Joseph) became Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It is remarkable how short their memories are. Some Opposition Members remember with amusement but also with dismay the reading list — Adam Smith and various other authorities—that the right hon. Member circulated to his civil servants about how manufacturing industry was not really important to the country and how the service sector would pull the economy, industry and the country up by the boot straps so we did not need to worry about manufacturing industry. That was the philosophy that the Conservative party introduced in 1979 when they took over the reins of power. The consequences of dismantling previous policies, many of which had been put on to the statute book under the Industry Act 1972 by the then Prime Minister and his colleagues, are there for all to see.

During this Government's period of office, employment in the south-east, East Anglia and the south-west has grown by 367,000, if the self-employed are included in the figure, but in the rest of Britain 1,047,000 jobs have been lost. As a percentage of the work force, registered unemployment has risen far more in the north than in the south. The figures and the census to which I referred earlier show that. One need only look at the Government's submission to the European Community's regional development fund showing that the regional disparity has widened in the past 20 years and that the worst hit regions in the United Kingdom are over-represented among the worst hit regions in Europe. We have five of the 12 highest unemployment regions in the European Community — Northern Ireland, Merseyside, Dumfries and Galloway, Strathclyde, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Cleveland. The only parallels are southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Ireland. Of the worst 30 regions, the United Kingdom has 10. We are far and away the worst hit area in the European Community. We have the worst regional pockets of unemployment in the whole European Community.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: No, I really must not give way again.

The situation that I have described is not surprising. The manufacturing sector has been predominantly in the regions and it is from that sector that we have lost the most jobs.

There is an overwhelming case for devolving far more power, authority and resources to the regions. The City plays a very important role, but it could make a much greater contribution to the regions than it does today. The malaise in the City is debilitating the financial institutions and our economy. It is also debilitating industry and commerce. An honest and open City would be a national asset, but a corrupt City is a national liability. Alliance Members have said before that the Government have not given enough independence to the newly established Securities and Investments Board to enable it to carry out its role as the City watchdog. We should like it to have more independent members and I moved an amendment to the Financial Services Bill to that end. We should also like it to be financed and supported not by the City but by Government funds. It should be seen as a body that is independent of the City and not as one that belongs to and is dominated by the City.

In the light of recent events, the City is undoubtedly on trial. There have been too many scandals. I accept that a minority of people in the City are causing those scandals and behaving in an unacceptable way, but many people who have known the City for many years are becoming worried that that minority is too large and that too many people and institutions in the City have been infected by this sort of corruption. It is to be hoped that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will bring their investigations to a speedy conclusion so that this boil can be lanced and the good name of the City restored.

It is also important that the Civil Service should be above any reproach or doubt. I was disturbed by a report in *The Times* this morning that the investigation into insider trading and into the role of some civil servants had not led to the suspension of the civil servants involved. In my experience, that would have been the normal procedure in a case of this kind. I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify what is happening about the Government's investigation of their own staff.

What should be done to overcome the problems which I have outlined and which have been exacerbated by the Government's policies? The Government began their monetarist experiment when they came to office in 1979. That experiment, and the Government's attitude to industry, have led to the present levels of unemployment and to the decline in manufacturing industry. The only way the Government can get us out of this mess is by expanding the economy and investing any surplus cash that the Chancellor of the Exchequer may have under the fiscal adjustment in the forthcoming Budget so as to ensure that the industrial base of the country is strengthened.

That does not mean providing help only for research and development and for design and high technology, which the Government are now doing but were not doing when they first came to office. It means investing more money in education and training. The Secretary of State for Employment will doubtless tell us how much he is spending now on the youth training scheme, but that scheme has been spatchcocked together without any predetermined plan so it does not dovetail into the comprehensive training system that this country so desperately needs.

We need to bring together the remaining industrial training boards, the work being done in further education and with apprenticeship schemes as well as the youth

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training scheme so that they all fit into a comprehensive system to provide proper training opportunities and qualifications for young people. Young people in Germany and Japan are being provided with training opportunities and qualifications of that kind. We need investment not only in industry but in people. The Government should embark upon that investment in the forthcoming Budget rather than cutting taxes to help those already in work rather than the millions still out of work.

If we are to increase the output of manufacturing industry and the performance of the economy generally, the Government must do something about the uncompetitive nature of unit labour costs, which increased from 4·6 per cent. to 5·75 per cent. last year. They are not the lowest in Europe by any means and the forecast is that in 1987 they will increase by 5·25 per cent. If that happens, we shall lose out to our German, French and other competitors. That will simply make worse the looming balance of payments crisis due to what has happened to the price of oil.

There is only one way to reduce unit labour costs—by the Government having a clear incomes strategy and working with the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress to ensure that pay settlements are brought down and are in line with productivity. For some years the Chancellor of the Exchequer has exhorted industry to bring pay settlements down to a reasonable level so that they are more in line with inflation and productivity, but he has invoked no policy to bring that about. Such a policy is absolutely essential if we are to get the expansion of the economy in the real world and not go into consumption in the way that the Government are presently engineering.

Present forecasts suggest that the Chancellor will make a fiscal adjustment of between £2·5 billion and £3 billion. It would be scandalous if he used that to generate more consumer expenditure in the economy, which will merely create jobs in Japan, in America and in France and other EEC countries rather than in Britain. It is scandalous that the Government have allowed pay increases to go way ahead of the levels of inflation and allowed consumer credit to increase beyond all imagination. They are now to compound that by giving further tax cuts which will further boost consumer spending and create jobs overseas but not in Britain.

We urge the Chancellor to adopt the approach that I have suggested so as to ensure a rapid decline in the levels of unemployment to which we have been subjected by the Government over the past seven years. For the people in the regions and in the north, it is urgent that the change in economic policy should take place. Without it there will be no hope of getting the unemployment figure below 3 million and keeping it there and manufacturing industry will continue in the decline that has been taking place throughout the Government's period of office to the detriment of the regions and of the country as a whole.

6.51 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I intervene to make, as briefly as I can, four practical points. The first is on the question of the north-south divide, with which I understood the debate to be largely concerned. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is right that for a long time there has been a north-south divide. What is characteristic of these past few years is that the dividing line has moved further and further south. My right hon. Friend is also right that that is largely due to historical and geographical reasons—the placing of our industry and our ports and the changes in trade patterns that have occurred since.

Since 1945, in cyclical variations, Scotland, the north and Wales suffered first and came out of the cyclical arrangement last. With the development policies that were pursued by successive Governments, that was gradually changed. The first change came about in Wales, then later on in Scotland and the north-east.

In this decade the line has come south of Birmingham, and the midlands, for the first time, has found itself affected by a post-war cyclical change from which it has never suffered before. The consequence of that is that, whereas the midlands has often complained about action which was being taken in development policies for the rest of the country, now the midlands is asking that it should be treated equally at least with the other parts of the country which are benefiting from regional policy.

The point that I would like to make to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is that the Government are investing more in those areas outside the south, but they are not getting the benefit of what they are doing publicly because they are still emphasising—as he did in his speech, and as the Prime Minister has done—that there are rich areas in the north. That implies, "Why are you making a fuss?" They then say, "Everything must be left to competition." Neither of those things is helpful with regard to the regions.

Some spots in Scotland, Wales and the north are richer than others, but they are limited compared with the south. The people who live in those areas know that perfectly well, and they know the appalling problems with which they are confronted from the point of view of jobs and certain other accessories of life. Therefore, as long as that attitude is adopted we cannot make the appeal to them that we ought to be making.

Then we have the claim that everything must be left to competition. It is quite plain that competition does not have an answer to these problems. There has been criticism of development policies—it used to come particularly from the midlands—that they had achieved nothing. That is a completely fallacious argument. The development policies achieved the changes that I have mentioned. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister says that it is wrong to treat those areas as if they were down and out, she is in part correct. The north-east has the finest infrastructure of any part of the country. Parts of Scotland have a magnificent infrastructure. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister says that there are high-tech areas in Scotland that are successful and profitable, she is right—but why? It is because we put the money into building Livingston and gave industry the inducements to go to Livingston. Therefore, Livingston has concentrated on high tech and it is successful. None of that would have happened had it been left to competition and the market.

Mr. Lawson: I know that my right hon. Friend is trying to make the most objective assessment that he can of regional policy in the past, but will he concede that the problem in the west midlands—it is the west midlands, not the east midlands; I represent an east midlands constituency and the east midlands is not a hard hit part of the country at all—arises in large measure because,

under past regional policies, business men wanted to place their investment in the west midlands but were prevented from doing so.

Mr. Heath: With great respect to my right hon. Friend, that is a repetition of the fallacy. West midlands business men wanted to expand at a time when the area was already understaffed from the point of view of working population and overcrowded from the point of view of plant. That was the plain fact. But they wanted to follow their own interests and they said that they wanted to expand and go out in the countryside. They said, "Don't worry about the environment; let us go there." We asked about the shortage of people, but they said that that did not matter because they would bribe them to go there, and that was part of the wage spiral. That is the fallacy that lies at the root of the argument that all must be left to the market and competition.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heath: No, I am sorry, I shall not give way. I am going to be brief.

Looking at the successes, various parts of Scotland and the north-east have been very successful as a result of development policy. When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor says that his area is not greatly concerned about unemployment, all I can say is that the line has moved so far south that the most delectable area of Sidcup has unemployment of 9·5 per cent. I do not regard that as satisfactory or bearable; it is deplorable. That is the way in which the north-south line has moved.

My conclusion is that, as the Government are investing in the regions, there are parts in which they should invest more. If they have available money, rather than reducing taxes they should go for investment. Then they should have a constructive, co-ordinated development policy for the country as a whole.

Scotland has the best policy, because it is a combination of Government money and private enterprise money and that is due largely to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, because he brought that about while he was Secretary of State for Scotland. That is the attitude that the Government should be fostering.

With great respect to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—I have never paid so much respect to him before—mergers and amalgamations are associated with regional problems. One of the overall problems from which we are suffering as a result of development since we reached the height of the industrial revolution in this country has been the movement of headquarters out of Merseyside or Newcastle-upon-Tyne down to London. When cyclical difficulties appeared, it was the places outside the headquarters that suffered. They were the bits that were closed down and where the jobs were lost. In the event of an amalgamation or merger by one of these hydra-headed concerns the chances are that the headquarters—in this case, on Merseyside—would have been closed, and later on, when things became difficult again, it would be that area that suffered. That is why there is a direct link between people's fears and amalgamations, mergers and absorptions, for which there is undoubtedly a mania at the moment. It is no concern to me whether that is the responsibility of the Labour Government in 1964 or 1970; it is past history. What does concern me is the present and the future.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): In this particular case I think that my right hon. Friend will agree that there is no reason at all to suppose that investment at St. Helens would have been reduced by BTR. One has only to look at the way in which it managed to turn round Dunlop and the extra investment in that company, the extra employment and the extra profits that that company has continued to produce.

Mr. Heath: I greatly respect my hon. Friend's experience, but not everybody would agree with his assessment of what happened to Dunlop. I was reading today an account in the financial press which says that Dunlop is but a pale shadow of what it was as one of our major tyre producers. I do not trust any such organisations, because their purpose is to gain the money which is in an existing firm.

That brings me to the second aspect of this, which is that it is the short-term view which is being taken, not the long-term view. People want to get their hands on a firm, above all, a family firm, which takes a long-term view and sets aside money for investment. They do not want it for further investment, but so that later on they can, if they get the opportunity, sell it off and use the money for profit dispersal. That is what they want and that is what they do. One has seen that in the United States to an extent to which it has damaged United States industry, and one sees the frailties of United States industry. I have great anxieties that the same thing is happening here, and there is every reason to be anxious about it.

I come now to the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I have the utmost sympathy for my right hon. Friend, and I understand his position. It was difficult for him. He is not in any way at fault because he is governed, apparently, at the moment, by the Tebbit guidelines of 1984. Those cannot take the place of the Fair Trading Act 1973 which insists on the public interest. The Tebbit guidelines say that competition is almost the only thing that matters. No Secretary of State has a right to change the law in that way. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that his first task should be to change the guidelines to enable him to get back to the public interest.

Now we are told that we have competition because it is competition which considers the public interest. That is obviously not the case and never has been. That is not what competition is about. Nor is it the business of shareholders to decide the public interest on a merger. Shareholders are not in a position to decide the public interest. Can we blame a shareholder if he seizes a sum that he is being offered which it appears unlikely he will be offered again? There may well be a completely different attitude in a family business because the family will want to continue the business and will resist the short-term view and take the long-term view for the sons and grandsons. But that is not the case in a competitive firm such as we saw trying to take over Pilkington.

However, I must say that BTR has shown far more sensitivity, common sense and understanding of the political situation in Britain than General Motors did. If General Motors had done that, we would have been spared much of the agony and harassment which went on over that case. BTR should be given credit for having recognised the political climate on both sides of the House and for having acted accordingly.

[Mr. Heath]

Here I suggest that we immediately get back to the public interest. It can be referred and then come forward. But the Government of the day are the only body which can consider the public interest. It is the Government of the day who are responsible for doing that. The Government must not abdicate that responsibility by saying that they will leave it all to competition or to the market. I hope that, now that this incident has occurred and public opinion on Merseyside and in the House has made itself so clear, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will move back to the official terms of the Act and get away from the Tebbit guidelines. Then he will be able to make a judgment in the public interest as a whole, which is the Government's responsibility.

My third point relates to the City. Because of the internationalisation of monetary institutions and the position of the City, official regulation is inescapable. I do not believe that the City is any longer capable of self-regulation. It is not an interest to declare, but I was brought up in the City in merchant banking. At that time, it was possible for the City to regulate itself. There was no legislation on insider dealing because nobody imagined for a moment that there would be an orgy of insider dealing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on".] With great respect, I was there before my hon. Friends and I know the philosophy and ethic of the City at that time. The City did not reckon to involve itself in that. I see the faces of all my younger hon. Friends. That is not something that they can ever visualise, but I am sorry it happened.

If something was believed to be irregular or was likely to cause trouble, the Governor of the Bank of England just sent for the senior partner. When that happened we waited to see what the Governor had said. If he said, "I think that you are getting a bit low. You are under your 12 per cent.," one knew that that was the end of the matter and one had to get back quickly. If one did not, there was trouble. That is no longer possible today. Therefore, instead of trying to find a halfway house, we must face reality and recognise that there must be official regulation of the City.

The Securities and Exchange Commission has great powers. Under the Reagan Administration those powers have not been used because appointments to the SEC have been along the lines of President Reagan's own thoughts about capitalism and its operation. But now the SEC is coming back into its own. It is having to do so because of the present scandal. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) takes the view that he brought the scandal to the Government's notice, whereas most of us thought that it was because the SEC dealt with it. However, I am prepared to give credit to both.

The SEC dealt with the matter in three or four months [HON. MEMBERS: "Four years".] With great respect, it dealt with it in three to four months. A slight financial penalty of $100 million was imposed and there was the knowledge that all the other scandals would be revealed.

The problem that we have always had to face—I hope that when my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General replies he will deal with this—is, and I think that this is the truth of the inquiry being made at the moment, that the inquiry has no powers to enable it to follow with a prosecution. Therefore, everything which is done must be duplicated by those who can then make the prosecution.

In my experience, which is some time ago when we had the Rolls Razor case and Mr. Bloom, we set up an inquiry immediately. That is all right, but it is not the real point. The real point is how quickly action will be taken on an inquiry. If one is trying to give the City a lesson on how it should behave, it is no use that happening many years hence. That lesson must be taken with prosecution in the immediate future. In the particular case that I am mentioning, the inquiry took two and a half years, and then, in order to have a criminal prosecution, there had to be a replica of the inquiry by those with powers to take evidence in a form which could then be used in a criminal prosecution.

The question is whether this inquiry has the power to bring about a criminal prosecution or whether it will wait and then refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions who will then have to get the evidence for the criminal prosecution. That means that there will have to be a replica of the hearings which have been held. That is an important point. If the situation involves duplication, then as a practical point I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the new body that he is setting up to inquire into fraud should have that power and should start at the beginning and not duplicate something that is already being done. That is my third practical point.

My fourth point is that constantly we seem quite incapable of getting Government and both sides of industry to work together on a problem. For a long time I have found that the most disturbing aspect of our national life. One sees it constantly. We saw it in the case of Nimrod and we see it in the Government's use of new technology imported from other countries. We have heard about the increase in imports. What is it in our national character that prevents us from doing what the Germans, the Japanese and the Americans can do? As a result, Germany and Japan have a much more successful industrial base than we have.

Only the Government can give a lead and the people who can follow are the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the trade unions and finance. Finance ought to be the servant of national life, industry, agriculture and production. As we have seen in the last few months, more and more it is becoming the master of national life. Finance takes the short-term view and allows three months only. If the results after that time do not seem satisfactory, the management is changed and somebody takes over the firm. There is no interest whatever in the long-term point of view.

For those who are working the markets, it is not even a three-month view, it is three seconds, and if the answer is not up on the screen in front of them in three seconds they must do something about it. We cannot have a successful industry or a successful national life on the basis of a purely short-term view, yet that sort of view is becoming more and more common and the City is giving a lead. Those are my four practical points.

There must be an overall development policy and in the public interest the Government must take the ultimate responsibility for amalgamations and mergers. Competition is not in the ultimate public interest. In terms of the City, we have moved into an entirely new sphere of financial operations and financial life, in the same way as

New York and Tokyo have moved. We must face that and it is much better to take clear and firm action now than to have it dragged out of us later.

Lastly, we need much closer working co-operation between Government and industry if we are to move forward and recreate the industrial base which is so badly needed to provide the employment that our people need. I hope that the Government will advance that view and say that they want to see these problems worked out jointly. We need to help one another if we are to solve the problems that exist.

7.13 pm

Miss Betty Boothroyd (West Bromwich, West): We are debating crucial and fundamental issues about the quality of life for millions of families. My chief concern is with the west midlands and I emphasise that the problems plaguing that area are related not only to jobs and industry. They are also to do with public services, housing, and inadequate resources for health care and training. The problems are all-consuming and have come about because of long-term problems associated with old industrial areas. That was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath).

The problems have been compounded because policies pursued by the Government have made every problem worse. In consequence, the entire economy of the west midlands region is collapsing upon itself. As one job is lost and as one firm and one industry has folded, each has sucked into that collapse other jobs, other firms and other industries which they previously sustained.

When she was Leader of the Opposition the Prime Minister visited Birmingham. She told the people of the west midlands at that time that unemployment was not inevitable. She insisted that job losses could be halted, that there was a cure for unemployment and that she had the medicine. That was in the election campaign of 1979. Since then whole industries have been destroyed and firms that were household names have gone out of existence. Yet there is a skill shortage, especially in engineering. A recent joint report by the CBI and MSC revealed that one in seven firms in the region has to restrict its production because it cannot recruit key workers. Some 71 per cent. of firms surveyed said that they had been short of engineers for over a year.

We are suffering from policies which have led to a reduction from 28,000 to 9,000 in the intake of apprentices into general engineering since 1979. That is a massive loss and I look forward to the Minister telling us how it can be made good. In the manufacturing sector alone more than 280,000 jobs have disappeared in the region and over 24,000 people in my borough of Sandwell have lost their livelihoods under this Administration.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss Boothroyd: I ought to make it clear that I do not intend to give way to any hon. Member. Too much time has already been taken up in this debate by interventions.

The Prime Minister's medicine is killing the patient.

Along with the dereliction of industry, we have also suffered an attack by the Government on public services such as transport, social services and housing — an attack on every essential of the life of the community. At a time when the demands on all those agencies is increasing because of job loss and industrial decay, money and resources for renewal to sustain the social structure have not been forthcoming.

The National Economic Development Council has warned that the infrastructure in the older industrial areas has been allowed to deteriorate so badly that there is a critical need for repair and renewal. That report argued for major increases in expenditure on roads, sewers, housing, schools and hospitals. That is not news to the Opposition because we have been arguing that case for a long time. I should like to give a couple of examples from my area because nowhere are jobs and houses more crucially needed than in the west midlands.

We have 288,000 privately owned houses in need of urgent improvement. We have some 165,000 council houses with serious defects and 110,000 families on council waiting lists. Despite the fact that some 6,000 people are on the council waiting list for homes in my borough, the housing investment programme allocation for Sandwell has been massively reduced in the last seven years from £35 million to £12 million. Since the Prime Minister came to office, my borough has lost in real terms a massive £163 million in rate support grant. That loss is equivalent to £535 for every man, woman and child in the borough.

A letter from the Builders Merchants Federation expresses concern over the condition of the nation's housing stock. Perhaps other hon. Members have received the same letter. The federation says:

"We feel it important to remind the Government of the difference between spending money for the sake of it and spending on investment".

The letter goes on to say that around £2 billion a year is needed for refurbishment and renewal and that a long-term political and financial commitment to construction would have a minimal effect on imports and a beneficial effect on unemployment. Such a commitment would undoubtedly benefit the west midlands but it does not seem to be forthcoming.

If we turn to the water industry in that region and the infrastructure there, the Severn-Trent water authority has 22,000 miles of sewer tunnels, all of them over 60 years old and much of it over 100 years old. The authority estimates that it will cost something like £10 million annually over 10 years to cope with urgent work to repair that infrastructure. This represents huge assets which are essential to support the industrial and social structure of that area. The number of complaints to the water authority about dirty water is evidence of the need to refurbish the water mains at an estimated cost of around £40 million. Yet the work is just not getting done because we are allowed to spend only half the money that we had 10 years ago for this type of renewal.

Anybody with common sense knows that the longer we delay tackling these jobs, the more it will cost disproportionately in financial and human terms. It does not seem to me that this Government understand about putting jobs and people together. That very revealing document submitted to the European Commission by the Government clearly showed that there are no plans to make any reduction in unemployment between now and 1990. For the west midlands the Government predict an increase in the working population and a fall in the number of jobs available. The document says:

"Continuing restraints on public expenditure . . . curtail the resources which central, local and public sector authorities have available to undertake development programmes or take

[Miss Boothroyd]

advantage of significant infrastructure development opportunities. This in turn limits employment arising from construction programmes and major capital projects".

What an appalling admission that is. The Government know that the most effective way of getting people back to work is through public works programmes but the people of the west midlands can expect no such commitment from the Tory party.

Midlanders are decent people. They are men and women with families who seek the same comforts and opportunities as all of us. They want to work, but when a job vacancy occurs 50 people chase after it. That is the reality of the great divide.

Of course the west midlands, like the rest of our devastated regions, has pockets of prosperity. The Minister, winding up, will no doubt refer to them. I tell him simply—if anything grows in the west midlands it grows not because of this Government, but despite them. In the west midlands, as throughout the country, there are pockets where business, organisations, communities and people work to make things grow through the dustbowl of Thatcherism. Soon they will have a Labour Government working with them instead of a Government working against them.

In 1945 Clement Attlee described the mission of the Labour party as

"proving that socialism and common sense coincide more than our critics understand".

That definition has an irresistible appeal today.

We know that it is common sense to put homes into good repair and not wait until they collapse. The Prime Minister prides herself on being a prudent housewife. No prudent housewife keeps her money under the bed when the roof is leaking. We know it is common sense to invest Britain's money in British manufacturing. The Prime Minister believes it more sensible to invest overseas to help foreign manufacturers compete against us. We know it is common sense to train a highly skilled labour force to compete with our overseas competitors. The Prime Minister believes it sensible to run down apprenticeships and starve industry of skilled labour.

We know it is common sense to make sure that mergers and takeovers are judged against the nation's interests. The Prime Minister seeks to let vital firms be tossed about like chips in a casino. We know it is common sense to provide health care for our people, to act against the causes of ill-health and disease. The Prime Minister thinks it more prudent not to meet urgent need and to keep people waiting for treatment. We know that it is common sense to use money to put people back to work. The Prime Minister believes it more sensible to borrow money to keep people out of work.

In every area of our national life policies of common sense can be applied. They are policies which work and will unite our country. They will heal the nation's wounds and bring the family of Britain together again.

7.25 pm

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): As I listened to the Chancellor describing the achievements of this Government in gaining control over the economy, the one overwhelming thought that occurred to me was that it would have been very surprising if the record of a Tory Administration did not greatly exceed that of the preceding Labour Government. The debate in a sense, from their point of view, has an artificial ring about it because we are not dealing with problems that have emerged under this Government; we are not dealing with a change in the emphasis of our society or in our attitudes towards our industries that have suddenly sprung up. The problems we are dealing with—major shifts between one sector of the economy and another and one part of our country and another—are deep-seated and long-term.

I have no doubt whatsoever that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his predecessor, the present Foreign Secretary, are owed an immense debt by the party to which they belong and by the country for the fact that they have fought valiantly to bring about a reduction in inflation, a recreation of incentives, and to inject into British industry a quality of productivity that has long since escaped us.

That is not the issue of the debate. The issue of this debate is what are we going to do with the growth which the Government have achieved and how is it to be spread through one region of this country as opposed to another. As the issues become more acute, as the problems which will face our economy increase, as gradually the benefits of North sea oil diminish, as gradually the ability of the Government to realise assets reduces, and as the trade balance becomes more acute, then these issues and the balance within society will become that much more acute.

The shorthand of the "north-south divide" in a sense glosses over the realities of the situation. If one looks at the very large parts of the north of this country, one sees areas of extreme environmental attractiveness and companies which are winning in the world arena. It is by no means irrelevant to this debate that one of the background judgments which the country has had to exercise is whether a quite excellent company called Pilkington should be merged with a midland-based company. The fact is that both of them are situated in the midlands or the north. Nobody denies that both BTR and Pilkington, each in its own way, are excellent. So to suggest that there is no excellence in the north or the midlands, when two of the companies at the heart of our debate are both excellent, is grossly to miss the point.

There is a substantial area of quality, both environmental and industrial, in the midlands and the north. If one wants to see the most significant area of urban reclamation it is not to be seen in the east end of London but in the east end of Glasgow. Glasgow is rebuilding itself on a mixture of public enthusiasm and the ingenuity of a capitalist system in a way that 10 years ago would have seemed inconceivable to those who knew Glasgow well.

Mr. John Smith: It is a public sector initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: I said public enthusiasm. Let me in no way try to run from the fact that a Labour-controlled local authority has had the vision to see the opportunities of partnership with capitalism. Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes capital out of that, let him consider the alternatives. What has been done by Labour local authorities, which reject capitalism as though it was a plague? The very point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes is the essence of the case. If only the Labour party in its totality of the north would recognise the need to embrace capitalism, we would not have the problems there that we have today.

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have the last word when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: All right, if the right hon. and learned Gentleman insists.

Mr. Smith: Yes, I do insist. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, if he has studied the GEAR project, that by far the greatest amount of expenditure has come from the public sector. It can far better be described as a public venture than some form of capitalism. Will he also take the opportunity to criticise a Government who prevent so many local authorities from taking initiatives like that in their areas?

Mr. Heseltine: As the Minister at the time responsible for imposing upon east end of London boroughs the need to recognise capitalism, I shall take no lesson from the right hon. and learned Gentleman in how to co-operate with Labour authorities. Let me say it if the right hon. and learned Member wants it; if Labour in local government would recognise the constitutional position of local government and co-operate with central Government, who have a superior mandate, we would have a far healthier climate in the regions.

On the other side of the equation which points to the dilemmas of the north has to be weighed the equal dilemmas to be seen in the most acute areas of poverty close to central London and, of course, the long-seated structural disability to be found in the far south-west. So we are talking not about a north-south divide but about a balance where relative prosperity in many parts of the south and south-eastern areas is to be starkly contrasted with increasingly relatively under-privileged areas, particularly in the urban and more remote parts of the country.

The explanations for these things are complex. There have been without doubt long-term changes to which many right hon. and hon. Members have referred. It is obvious that if there is a broad concentration of manufacturing industry in the older towns and cities, a shift to service industry will upset the patterns of employment and prosperity. Equally, if the transport revolution, the house and property-owning democracy revolution and the destruction of the grammar schools all impose upon urban areas a lack of choice and a lack of quality, then those who have the strength to move will move. They will move to the suburbs and many of them will move to the south. If, over 30 or 40 years, there is a climate in which the tax system is orientated towards the destruction of family businesses and to the enhancement of institutional wealth, it is no surprise that increasing proportions of the power of the country become centralised in the City of London.

So great market forces and great changes, many of them beyond the control of the country, there have been, but the problem is that Governments of all parties have reinforced those market forces to a scale that I believe has been little perceived. I want to give just three examples. Mortgage tax relief has fuelled, rightly, the property-owning democracy. But a consequence of the inceatives to the property-owning democracy has been to give to the insurance companies, which cover the mortgages encouraged by the incentives, a vast flow of the savings of the nation. Those savings were invested broadly from a southern-orientated position. That is a £5 billion subsidy within the gift of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Pension funds pay no tax on their income. The revenue forgone by the nation is £3·5 billion a year. The consequence is to take the savings of the companies that generate the wealth out of those companies and to institutionalise them remotely at a cost of £3·5 billion a year.

If someone has a small or a medium-sized family business there is hanging over him, and has been for most of the half century, the knowledge that it is a one-generation business. He cannot pass it on. If he wants to sell it locally, the local community will almost certainly pay cash as opposed to the tax deferred shares which he can get from the publicly owned companies. The publicly owned companies are again subjected to the disciplines of the institutional wealth of the City of London. My right hon. Friend has made a significant shift in the prospects for family owned businesses. I admire and praise that, but he has not gone all the way to remove the disincentives to the local transfer of power. He still permits the concentration of power which comes when a family business has to judge whether to take cash, most likely local, or to take shares with tax deferral.

All those incentives add up to almost £10,000 million a year, driving the market as opposed simply to reacting to the market. Over a period of decades under all Governments, that has been the centralising process that has led to the point where people criticise the accumulation of wealth in the City of London.

Against that annual incentive there is a total regional policy of £600 million, most of which is concentrated at the extremes of the regions. Basically, there is perhaps under £200 million of what could effectively be called regional policy in England as opposed to the best part of £10 billion which is drawing the forces south. Those are the issues underlying the north-south divide.

All other capitalist economies with which we have to compete have similar problems—the drift to the south, the institutionalisation, the scale of modern money markets. But all of them in some way, though different in every way, have dispersed power and perpetuated the dispersal of power within their political system. The Americans and the Germans have federal systems of powerful elected governors, state banks and major corporations based in local economies. Those are all there to fight the corner of the particular area.

In Germany, as everyone knows, they have far less institutional wealth. The banks stay much closer to the companies. The lander have a basis of strength for the local politicians who lead them and who are national figures in their own right. The two-tier boards make it difficult for any multinational or remote company to exert an overbearing influence.

In France, as everyone knows, there is a much closer relationship between the provinces and central Government simply because many Cabinet Ministers are mayors of the local communities that they represent.

In Japan there is the central thrust of the MITI organisation, co-ordinating the strength of the ruthlessly efficient capitalist economy.

So there is in all other capitalist economies much the same problem but also an identification of it and a determination to try to counter and balance it. What do we in this country face by way of alternatives? There are

[Mr. Heseltine]

things that the Government can and should do, and which a Tory Government ought to do because only a Tory Government effectively recognise the need and could do them.

We should recognise the strength of the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Wales and for Scotland, who have a regional responsibility as opposed to a narrow functional responsibility. There is a relatively simple way of doing that. Instead of each Minister who has a responsibility for a functional part of Government representing only that aspect of Government, there would be little difficulty in associating each of those Ministers with a different part of the country, so that instead of having to go to an area to explain whether the transport, local government, housing or Home Office policies were right or wrong, the Minister would have to explain the totality of Government policy and would, therefore, be more aware of it.

Civil servants should be moved across the framework of Whitehall because at present they are orientated towards their departmental ethos. They are employed to brief Ministers to win for that Department, rather than to extend a Government policy more coherently.

I believe that it is necessary to neutralise those incentives that are having a significant effect in moving the forces of wealth creation to a central and remote control. In almost every policy, the Government's thrust, and the success of their thrust, is to push power further from the centre, for example, the sale of council houses and the start of the small industrial start-up schemes with all the incentives that they involve. When the education system has problems, we talk about giving teachers, head teachers and parents much more influence in the schools. However, we are still encouraging, with vast subsidies, the concentration of the major influences on wealth creation in the City of London. The incentives that are doing that should, at least, be neutralised.

I have no doubt that we must recognise the CBI's demands for an industrial strategy. Competition is of fundamental importance if one is to survive in a capitalist world. However, the nations with which we must compete do not rely wholly on a policy of competition. They are much more interested in balancing the excellence of competition with the strength of a coherent national endeavour to win.

One of the problems that we have inherited is the overbearing attitude of the Treasury, which dominates the climate of decision making. The public expenditure round sets the tone for policy-making in Whitehall and all else flows from that. That is not compatible with an industrial climate in which companies are trying to take long-term decisions about complex markets and investment for perhaps 10 years, as opposed to a relatively short period.

Therefore, it is necessary that a far more powerful Department of Trade and Industry should balance and counter the influence of the Treasury. The Pilkington case, which happily has now been resolved, would not have happened if this country had a clear understanding of the requirements of a long-term industrial strategy. The best solution would be for the institutional owners of wealth to organise themselves so that they could have a dialogue with the management of their companies and so that the managers who were committing themselves to long-term programmes knew that they had a certain degree of security from their owners. If managers do not get that security, they will invest for the short term, maximise the cash content of their companies and take attitudes towards training, research and development which will minimise their contributions in those areas. No other capitalist economy with which we compete behaves in that way. One way or another, all those economies are mobilising the resources of Government to back their capitalist systems and to give a degree of confidence to their managers to make them feel better able to make long-term investments.

The Government's record of innovation in city reclamation and the rebuilding of our cities is unlike that of any other Government in recent times. We have proved that we know how to bring back life to the city centres. It has been done most conspicuously in the east end of Glasgow, but the Government have also pioneered various inner-city initiatives in the east end of London. The money that we are putting into that is trivial in the context of the needs and priorities of those areas which are relatively less prosperous.

There is no case for Scotland and Wales to have Scottish and Welsh development authorities when there is not exactly the same determination and co-ordination in England. It should be a first priority for the Government to establish an English development agency to co-ordinate the administration of the urban policies of the Department of the Environment, and to do so in a climate that fuses together the strength of the public and the private sectors. The instrument of that agency should be an urban development corporation for large-scale activity. Where the quality of local government is inimical to partnership with the capitalist system a range of other instruments have been pioneered, for example, the private sector trusts, such as those in Thamesmead or Stockbridge which deal with smaller areas of activity. However, the Government have proved that it can be done and I can see no reason why we should not build on that on a huge scale.

It is of paramount importance that that should be done by this Government because anybody who has looked at the alternative policies confronting the country will realise that those policies can bring about only a deterioration, not an improvement. When one listens to Opposition Members talking about a climate in which they will tax until the pips squeak, they are really talking about the destruction of individual entrepreneurial activity and the break-up of family businesses—the very things that they now come here to discuss and to which they would return, if they were returned to power.

When Opposition Members discuss repealing the Employment Acts introduced by the Government, they are talking about returning to the trade unions—that unique combination of anarchy and restrictive practices—precisely the power to undermine the country which they used so successfully for so long. Hon. Members talk about more power for local government, but anyone who has perceived what local government in the hands of the Labour party has done to alienate anyone who has the choice to leave our cities will realise what the future offers. All this pushes on to the Conservative party an added responsibility not to innovate in a way that we have refused to do, or to go back on anything that we have previously said, but simply to do on a bigger scale and with greater conviction the things that we have already proved work.

7.45 pm

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am glad to have caught your eye in this important debate on the Government's economic policy and its effect on the regions and on the division of wealth between the north and the south. Bearing in mind Mr. Speaker's request, I shall do my best to be brief so that my hon. Friends, particularly those from the north, can participate and make their contributions.

I support the general thrust of the Opposition motion and the arguments put forward by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench in their attack about our divided nation. That divide has been caused by the Government's deliberate policies since 1979.

I shall speak mainly on the effects on the city of Liverpool. The widening gap between north and south is made clear by irrefutable statistics which show the poverty and deprivation that are causing increasing difficulties in the inner urban areas of our major cities and regions. The city planning officer of the city of Liverpool has recently reported on the budget options to be considered by the city council which faces a £40 million shortfall. I am grateful to Mr. Hayes for the information that he has provided. Since 1979 more than 100,000 jobs have disappeared on Merseyside. That figure represents the population of a small town.

Liverpool has felt the brunt of the job losses. Between 1979 and 1984 Liverpool lost 65,000 jobs, which is a decline of 22 per cent., and that is still increasing. About 40 per cent. of those jobs were in the manufacturing industries, where employment is down by 46 per cent. About 19 per cent. of all blue collar service jobs have been lost as a result of major closures by multi-national companies in Liverpool, for example, the sugar company Tate and Lyle, the brewing company of Whitbread, the tobacco industry at British American Tobacco, and the confectionery industries of United Biscuits and Lyons Maid, and the sweets and chocolate firms of Barker and Dobson and Tavener Rutledge. The Government would not intervene to save one of the thousands of jobs that were lost.

The public sector has become increasingly important in the local economy. Despite a reduction in public jobs between 1978 and 1984, those jobs increased as a proportion of all jobs from 31 per cent. to 35 per cent. The city council is the largest employer in the city with 32,000 employees, or 14 per cent. of all jobs in 1984.

In spite of the importance of the public sector and the city council in maintaining jobs, and the battle between the council and the Government to provide jobs and services, the councillors are now facing disqualification and bankruptcy and they are appealing to the House of Lords next week. I hope that they will get more sympathy and justice in the other place than they have received from the Government in this House.

My constituency has the highest level of unemployment on the British mainland—more than 35 per cent. right across the board. In some areas the figure is 55 per cent. to 60 per cent. Those figures are morally indefensible. Long-term unemployment is a curse and we need positive Government action to put it right.

It is a fact that urban decline is more severe in Liverpool than in any other British or European city. Population decline with the loss of rate support grant is another major factor in the economic decline of our cities. In common with other cities, Liverpool continued to lose population heavily between the 1970s and 1981. Since 1981 the rate of loss has fallen from 9,000 a year to 6,500 a year, but that rate remains significantly higher than that in other conurbation core cities.

The selective loss of younger more skilled workers is continuing. Many youngsters who are in despair of ever finding a job have taken the advice of the chairman of the Tory party, got on their bikes and left their families to find work and regain their pride. With the loss of traditional jobs in port cities, such as in shipbuilding, ship repairs and heavy engineering, skilled and semi-skilled workers have left, leaving an ageing unskilled labour force looking for the few jobs that remain to be found.

The number of households has not declined, so an increasing number of one person and pensioner households have been left. The social characteristics of the population must also be considered. The proportion of the employed population in Liverpool decreased from 42 per cent. to 34 per cent. between the 1970s and 1985, leading to a more dependent population on those fortunate enough still to have work. The unemployed, the sick and pensioners accounted for 33 per cent. of the population in 1985, compared with 19·3 per cent. in the 1970s.

The EEC survey puts Riverside as having the highest unemployment in Europe. Given that low incomes are the main cause of deprivation, several groups are at risk, including the unemployed. More than 30 per cent. of the male unemployed and 25 per cent. of the total work force are on the scrap heap. The highest rates of unemployment are among the young with a rate of 44·5 per cent. for 16 to 19-year-olds. That is an appalling waste of our youth resources.

I shall now turn to those dependent on state benefits. In 1985, 76,000 people in Liverpool received supplementary benefit and 94,850 received housing benefit. Both figures have increased since then. Particularly vulnerable groups, such as the over 75s and the sick and disabled, are increasing. It is estimated that a third of all full-time and three quarters of all part-time workers on Merseyside earn low wages. That is why my trade union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, has campaigned for a minimum living wage.

The position of children in low income households is illustrated by the fact that more than 50 per cent. of all school children now receive free school meals. That is a disgraceful figure and I hope that the Secretary of State will take note of it. The lowest income households are concentrated in inner-city areas and the highest income households in the owner-occupied, plush areas of south Liverpool. People living in inner-city areas have low levels of skills and car ownership and the areas receive a high education award. But there is a high level of unemployment, with children receiving free school meals and sickness. Following bus deregulation the poor have greater trouble in visiting relatives and hospitals than previously.

I shall deal briefly with the Newcastle upon Tyne social audit which was carried out in 1985. Newcastle has many problems similar to those of Liverpool. The audit examined the impact of Government policies on the city's residents within the national context of unemployment increasing two and a half times, a 10 per cent. overspending in public expenditure, half of which was due

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to increased social security benefits, and increases in essentials, such as fuel and rent by twice the level of inflation.

It was estimated that in Newcastle Government policies between 1979 and 1984 led to a reduction of £70 million in disposable income—that is, £700 for every household. That figure can be multiplied to show the total reduction for all our major cities. The audit concluded that the quality of life declined significantly and it examined two particular factors — the reduction in the provision of public services and the quality of public sector housing.

Liverpool city councillors have been trying to improve our housing stock by the demolition of pre-war slums and rat-infested multi-storey blocks of flats and by replacing them with new houses with gardens back and front. They are being crucified for doing so.

Finally, the audit identified the impact of unemployment. That was particularly marked in certain areas and groups, such as young people. The audit concluded that unemployment had serious effects on health, family life and crime. In Liverpool I know of the breakdown of marriages, of people having physical and mental breakdowns and of the increase in hard drug taking and petty crime, particularly among long-term, unemployed youth. One of the gravest problems of inner-city areas is the horrendous level of unemployment among young black people, but the Government continue to ignore that.

When the Paymaster General replies, I hope that he will not play us the same old record of how much the Government have already given in grants to the regions. I hope that he will address himself to the effect of long-term unemployment, deprivation and poverty in our regions and cities which is an affront to the pride and dignity of the poorest in our society. Since 1979, the Government have never made unemployment a serious issue. Can we hope for a change of direction? The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is alleged to have stated that nobody with a conscience could vote Tory. Given the Government's disastrous record and their attitude to the poor, for once I am completely in agreement with him.

7.55 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) seemed full of bluster but short on policy when he opened the debate. I would have thought that it would have been better if the Labour party had not selected the economy for debate. Labour Members postponed it last week, probably because they had cold feet as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested. I suppose that they attack the economy in order to play down their lack of a defence policy.

The Opposition have a cool cheek to attack the economy, considering their record. It is irresponsible for any Opposition Front Bench spokesman to talk down the British economy. I shall return to the gloom and doom of a balance of payments crisis around the corner, of which the right hon. Gentleman spoke. Their remedy is to tax initiative — we saw them do that when they were in office — and to borrow more. I remind Opposition Members that it is easy to borrow and spend, but difficult to repay. Considering that it costs between £17 billion and £18 billion to pay the interest on the national debt, it would be gross folly to increase it by any more than it is being increased at present.

Another plank of Labour policy is centralisation. Labour Members want to centralise control in local authorities and to tell local authorities to employ more people. They do not tell us what productivity figure we shall achieve from that. Any Government can cure unemployment by employing people in non-jobs and that is no doubt precisely what local authorities will do under a Labour Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said, that will return more authority to the trade union movement — we all saw what happened there — and centralise power in Whitehall. We have been through all that before and seen the folly of it, yet the Labour party tells us the same old story.

We have heard a great deal about the divided nation. We should bear in mind that the trade union movement has a certain responsibility for some of our industries in the north. I remind hon. Members—they will probably remember—of the month-long strike in the shipbuilding industry caused by a demarcation dispute whether a wood or metal worker should put a rivet through a piece of metal and wood. It is small wonder that we lost orders.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: No, I will not give way. We do not have much time and I have promised to be brief.

Mr. Heffer: All that happened 35 years ago.

Sir William Clark: The demarcation disputes caused us to lose orders. Indeed, it is small wonder that we lost orders. How could we possibly retain our competitive position if we were arguing over such stupid frivolities?

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made much play about manufacturing industries. I am sure that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton, (Mr. Heffer) will have considered the figures with avid interest. If we consider the record on visible trade — not invisibles — which includes manufacturing, for the last four years of the previous Labour Government, we discover that there was an overall deficit on the balance of payments of almost £4,000 million compared with what has happened since 1979.

Since 1979, visible trade has shown a deficit for four years and a surplus for three, with an overall deficit of almost £4 billion. However, if we take invisibles into account, the overall surplus is about £20 billion to £21 billion. Consequently, to some extent, when the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook says that there will be a crisis in balance of payments this year he is correct. There will be a deficit of about £1 billion to £1·5 billion. However, that is no reason to claim that the economy is bust and that it is all gloom and doom.

Consumer credit has been criticised. What would the Opposition do with consumer credit? The Government are not spending the money; the public are. Do the Opposition mean that the public must not spend money? Should we increase interest rates? If the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) wants to criticise consumer spending, he should consider the bad debt record on the so-called plastic money. That record is extremely low—

about 1 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman compares that with the debt in America, he will see that our spending nowhere approaches that in America.

Perhaps we will hear later how the Opposition would control consumer spending. Would they increase interest rates? Or would they tell the banks not to lend money and stop people spending their own money?

Great play has been made of taxes. I believe the late Iain Macleod once said that Labour increases taxes and the Conservatives reduce taxes. That is as true today as it was then. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reminded us, the Government have reduced the standard rate of tax from 33p in the pound to 29p. There may be a further reduction on 17 March—who knows? The Government's record with regard to the lower paid is very good. The starting rate of tax threshold has been increased by about 22 per cent. in real terms.

If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has any adjustment or alleviation of tax in view, I hope that he will concentrate on thresholds in preference to the standard rate. We must remember that a married man starts to pay tax at the standard rate when he earns £70 a week and a single person after he has earned £45 a week. When we consider that the national average wage is about £190 a week, the priority should be on thresholds. If my right hon. Friend can accommodate both, all well and good, but I am convinced that he should concentrate on thresholds.

The Opposition have referred to reductions in taxation and claim that the money should be spent on investment. Opposition Members must remember that some £25 billion is allocated for capital expenditure this year. Therefore, it is wrong of the Opposition to give the impression that the Government are not spending money on capital investment. It is also wrong for the Opposition to claim that the Government are trying to bribe the electorate because this is an election year. If that is the case, we have been bribing the electorate since 1979, as we have reduced taxes in successive Budgets since then.

Mr. Rogers: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: I will not give way. However, I believe that I know what the hon. Gentleman wants to ask. The threshold has been increased 22 per cent. above inflation each year that we have reduced taxation.

The Labour party is threatening the taxpayer with increased taxation. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reduces the standard rate of tax by 2p or increases thresholds by 10 per cent. or whatever, will a Labour Government—if by mischance a Labour Government were elected — make a cancellation or reduction retrospective? The taxpayer is entitled to know the answer to that.

We have also heard an accusation about oil. When I tackled the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook about the difference in the balance of payments deficits that existed when the previous Labour Government were in power and that under this Conservative Government, he claimed that the difference was due to oil. However, he did not say that the total revenue that this Government have had from oil over the past six or seven years is about £60 billion. Our overseas assets have increased from £20 billion in 1979, to £95 billion today. That will obviously help our invisibles and our export potential.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reminded the House, 1 million new jobs have been created since 1983. I know that that good news does not please the Labour Opposition and they always try to play that fact down, but having weathered a recession, that should be welcomed on both sides of the House.

The Labour party plans to let local authorities have more say in employment. The recent National Audit Commission report about local government expenditure was very interesting. The voter need only consider Brent and Haringey to discover what the Labour party will do if it comes to office.

It is impertinent of the Opposition to criticise the economic performance of this Government. Since 1979, we have come through a recession that was much deeper than most people had thought. Output and exports are up. Investments are up. Unemployment is on the way down. Our borrowing is down and that is extremely important. Taxes and inflation are down and the standard of living for every man, woman and child is higher today than it has ever been. In addition, we must remember that the Government have repaid half of the debt that the Labour Government incurred from the IMF.

The Conservative Government have created not only 62 per cent. owner-occupation but, following on from the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) about institutions, they have reversed the trend in the increase of wider share ownership. When the Government came to power, it was thought that there were about 3 million small shareholders. Today, with British Gas and British Telecom, there are more than 7 million small shareholders. That gives the shareholder, the voter, the ordinary man in the street, far more independence. I believe that it is much better to give the citizen more independence by allowing him to buy his council house and to encourage him to buy shares. I am convinced that that can only be achieved under a Conservative Government. It would be a disaster for the small man if there were ever to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Labour Government.

8.8 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): The Treasury Bench must always find comfort in the contributions from the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark). If the north-south divide is the subject of today's debate, the Chancellor of the Exchequer certainly gave it a by-pass operation in his remarks.

Economic policy is now geared more to the election than to the longer term considerations of the country's economy. Frankly, I wonder what the past eight years of economic and fiscal policy have been about. The Chancellor can chide my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as much as he likes, but the Chancellor's November statement gave relaxation to the brakes that he was so insistent should be placed on public expenditure.

I listened to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) talk about regional policy. It was interesting that he mentioned the success of the Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal Project. The Government have pulled the plug on that project, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) angrily had to point out when the decision was made to end it.

There is no doubt that the points made earlier by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) reflected the difficulties that have operated over the post-war years in respect of regional policy. However, the tide

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is now running out for the north of Britain in the operation of regional policy. So many of the in-built advantages of post-war regional policy have been eroded or dismantled. Apart from the pushes that the Macmillan and Heath Administrations gave, the great impetus for regional policy since the war has always come from a Labour Government.

I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Henley extol the virtues of the Scottish Development Agency. It was the previous Labour Government who introduced that agency and the Welsh Development Agency. The Scottish economic picture would be infinitely worse had it not been for the contribution that the agency has made, in spite of the fact that there has been a curtailment in its resources and on the impetus that it has been able to bring.

I have never ceased to be surprised by the number of businessmen who come to me as a constituency Member looking for support from public funds. I take the simplistic view that if it means jobs for my area then I am for it. I do not think that many building firms would willingly ignore the possibility of public contracts any more than a civil engineering company would not want to bid for any public project. Retailers will say that they want to see more people in employment so that there is greater purchasing power which will assist the economy and business.

If we are talking about the drift that has taken place from the north to the south, the sooner the Government get their act together the better. The real need is for the removal vans to be busier in the London area and for more Government offices to be dispersed to other parts of the United Kingdom so that the people involved in the decision-making will be working in different parts of the country. The United Kingdom seems to have a far greater percentage of corporate headquarters located in its capital than almost any other country. Therefore, there is a need to persuade many of the companies that they should be located in Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen or Cardiff. There is no reason for the concentration in the metropolis. That would have a beneficial effect. It would force an increase in the standard of living in many of those parts of the country. If some of the top civil servants and company directors were living and working in those areas they would make sure that the housing, environment, schools, shopping facilities and the arts were all much better and much richer.

It used to be said that the Tories represented industry and commerce. Nowadays I think that they are far more influenced by the financiers who are concerned only with getting rich quick and flattered by some Right-wing academics who have never done a hand's turn on the shop floor but can write a book about how British industry should be operated.

There is no point quoting unemployment figures, because the only quotations that the Treasury Ministers are concerned with are those from the stock exchange. It might have more effect if I were to quote such figures. In any case, we have had some 19 changes in the method by which the unemployment is calculated so that nobody really needs take it as seriously as they once did. However, the proportion of people in the hopeless position of being long-term unemployed is the most significant and worrying aspect of the unemployment problem.

We have heard today about the withdrawal of the BTR bid for Pilkingtons. Last week we seemed to be facing a worrying situation with the Barr and Stroud company in Glasgow which employs over 2,500 people. There was a concentration of research and development that would have easily been dispersed in favour of short-term profit. Eating the seed corn of tomorrow's investment for today's profit is seen in many other parts of the United Kingdom. A blood bath has taken place in Scotland in terms of Bell's Whisky and Distillers, and Guinness has not come up to Scotland to locate its headquarters as promised. I speculate that perhaps the next merger will be Argyll and Guinness in order to avoid hefty legal suits.

The Chancellor talked about Edinburgh as an important financial centre, second only to London. It is a small second fiddle when it comes to some of the key decisions that have to be taken. Some of the people who are doing best in our society at present are advertisers, stockbrokers and company lawyers. They are all doing well out of the boom in mergers. We should not kid ourselves that it is all about improving competition and increasing the flow of benefits for the consumer because some of us are long enough in the tooth to know that it is nothing of the kind.

This new year Scotland has had a cruel Ne'er-day. There was the announcement about Caterpillar. We know that United States investment has been a sizeable segment of investment in manufacturing jobs in post-war Scotland. It is all too easy to write off the significance of manufacturing and to overplay the importance of the service sector. They are both important and the sooner we recognise the interplay of the two the better. Any advanced economy needs a good and strong manufacturing sector as well as a buoyant service sector.

The only growth industry we seem to have at Westminster is nostalgia. Even the Prime Minister keeps referring to the previous Labour Government. That was eight years ago. There are millions of young people who will vote for the first time in the next election. There are many young people who voted in the previous election but who did not remember too much about a Labour Government. I just make the political point that we are living too much in terms of past considerations. *[Interruption.]* I digress, but if I were to take a walk down memory lane I could be every bit as selective as the Prime Minister.

In my area, unemployment has doubled and almost trebled. Many old age pensioners find that, in real terms, their pensions are worth less. Prospects for young people are infinitely more depressing in terms of real jobs, as the Prime Minister would say. Youth training schemes have not had the long-term success that some employment Ministers seem to have envisaged. Many training professionals realise that, in many ways, when one tries to generalise training, one loses out on the specific skills—high skills. Already there are signs of skill shortages. There is little evidence that the Government are doing a great deal to combat these shortages.

Benjamin Disraeli might be amused at the frequency with which his words, "Two nations", have entered the currency of today's language. Of course, he was talking about rich and poor rather than about north and south. The singular point that he made was that one set of people did not understand, far less comprehend, the values of the other set of people. It was evident, listening to the right hon. Gentleman, that the Chancellor, whatever he

comprehends south of Blaby, certainly does not know much about what is going on in the northern parts or even the western parts of the kingdom.

The problem facing the country is not entirely an economic one. It is bound up with our political and social attitudes. It is evident that, with the loss of common identity that we have experienced during the period of this Conservative Government, there is no willingness to look beyond the immediate returns of the ballot box. The Government say, "If they do not vote for us, we are not interested in them." We require a new political willingness on the part of Government to accept their responsibilities. They have manifestly failed to do that.

8.22 pm

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): I do not for one moment accept the criticisms made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen) about the attitudes of Conservative Members.

As one who has always represented a constituency in the north of England, I shall focus on the regional aspects of the debate. Indeed, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I said to the Conservative party conference in 1985 that I regarded the vast gulf between the different parts of the country as being the greatest social and economic problem that faced us as a nation. I went on to say that, because regional industrial policy was one of the crucial instruments to bridge that gulf, we should never allow regional policy to become the Cinderella of industrial policy. I shall suggest some further important steps in regional policy that can and should now be taken.

Having said that, the picture presented by the Opposition has been an absolute travesty of reality. What is worse, the Opposition's policy proposals, if implemented, would make the disease far more severe. To inflate the economy by borrowing or to increase taxation on the scale that would be necessary to give effect to the Opposition's proposals would bring to a rapid halt the economic recovery and the expansion that are now taking place. As for the proposals by the alliance, although they may be wrapped up a bit more, they perhaps involve slightly less inflation in drag.

As some hon. Members have said, the divisions in the country are not only between the north and the south. That is a crude over-simplification. The divisions are between the older industrial areas and the rest. The west midlands is a good example of a part of the country that cannot be described as the north, even by shifting the map southwards, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) would have us do. It is important to understand what has happened and is happening in older industrial areas and not to accept a distorted view if we are to be able to take steps to put things right. Of course the recession involved an extremely sharp contraction in manufacturing activity and a tragically large number of job losses. Of course the assisted regions were hit worse. They were the areas in which, on the whole, old manufacturing industries existed.

Since 1981, there has been a significant increase in manufacturing output and investment. It is important that that increase has taken place in the regions as well as in the south-east. The economic growth currently taking place is substantial, impressive and soundly based. It will not collapse in an inflationary bubble, as happened with previous expansion. If regional disparities are more conspicuous now than in the past, it is not because the regions are still in decline but because the growth of development and prosperity in the rest of the country is proceeding at an even faster rate. That is the real nature of the problem that we face today, and a correct perception of it affects what we should do about it. Vital as industrial and regional policies are, in any country that does not have a Communist regime, or something approaching a Communist regime, economic rather than industrial policies most affect business men. What happens to interest rates? Where does the exchange rate stand? What are the levels and structure of taxation? What progress is made in fighting inflation? These factors most affect industrial prospects.

God help industry if those factors were to be determined by the kind of policies put forward by the Opposition. A sharp change in the exchange rate or a dramatic alteration in interest rates is likely to have far more effect on most companies than the introduction or withdrawal of some assistance scheme would have. The follies of the Opposition do not absolve us from the duty to do everything in our power to reduce the present gulf between different parts of the country. If hon. Members consider the congestion on the M25 before it was hardly open and examine the escalation of house prices in the south-east they will realise that it is quite apparent that progress towards the solution of the problem is just as important for the south-east as it is for other parts of the country. The solution is not to lure away vast numbers from the regions to swell the ranks of the south-east, even if we could find a way to do it. It would inevitably mean luring away a disproportionate number of the brightest and the best, leaving behind an increasingly pauperised population and an infrastructure that would become steadily more difficult and expensive to service.

They would be making a grave mistake if the Government thought that they could solve the problem by trying to decide which industries should thrive and which should fall, and deciding where that should take place, and then intervene on a massive scale to make it all happen. George Brown tried to do that. The ink was hardly dry on the national plan before it was hopelessly out of date. Cosmetic involvement by industrial institutions would not make such a plan likely to succeed today, as I heard hinted during the course of the debate.

My experience of politicians and civil servants does not lead me to believe that they are better able to pick the winners than those who put their own money at stake. Sometimes politicians and civil servants must make commercial judgments, but that is different from the Government seeking to design and put into place the future pattern of industry. Rather than doing that across the board, we should specifically tackle the problems of the regions both by action on the supply side and by direct regional assistance.

I do not accept the view of those who say that regional policy in the classic sense has failed. The latest study commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry from the Cambridge department of land economy concluded that 630,000 jobs have been created over the years in assisted areas by regional policy. If we do not like the picture today—nor should we—the truth is that it would be far worse without such a policy. But it is obviously not enough.

I do not see any need for an ideological divide between those who wish to proceed along the route of regional

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policy in the classic sense and those who believe in supply-side action. Both are necessary. If we are candid, we must accept that we do not know with sufficient certainty what works, so it would not be wise to reject either approach. The problem is of sufficient magnitude for it to be necessary for us to accept both.

Turning to the so-called supply side, I welcome the increased interest and discussion about regional pay bargaining. I do not think that it is too much to ask those who are fortunate enough to have jobs in the assisted areas to take a lower increase in pay to let more people on the dole get jobs. The problem in the north-east, for example, is not that those in work are too poor. It is that too many people do not have a job at all.

There is much to be said on that side of the equation for urgently examining whether income tax or national insurance rates can be regionally slanted to encourage employment in the regions. In addition, I would go further with the direct assistance to the regions; here I join the hon. Member for Maryhill. I think that we should give serious consideration to a fresh programme for the dispersal of Government Departments and agencies. There has already been substantial dispersal. If we are honest, it has brought problems as well as employment. If only people up to a certain grade move, the regional headquarters — they may be "headquarters" in name only — face the risk of becoming a backwater and problems of morale may be very great.

With totally new systems of communications developing rapidly, the need for top policy makers to stay in London is much less great than it was. We might well find on a fresh look that a whole new tranche of Government agencies could move out of London without any loss of efficiency. Although this step has not yet been taken, the Government have taken direct constructive action. I think that it is right to put on record the way in which regional policy has been evolving under the present Government. In recent months, there has been an announcement of new powerful urban development corporations — Trafford Park, Black Country, Tyne and Wear, Teesside and Cardiff Bay. That is a major new change.

It would be wrong to have a debate on this subject without referring to the city technology colleges. In the north-east, employers are saying that, with the upturn which has taken place, they have some jobs to give to youngsters. They regard it as a tragedy when people arrive hotfoot from school without the minimal skills of reading, writing and arithmetic which would enable them to be given the available jobs. Those colleges are part of regional policy and a major new development by the Government, but they are not the whole answer.

In many parts of the country, the problems of the regions are not just the problems of the inner cities. It would be a mistake to think that that is the case. There are parts of the regions—for example, the coalfields and the steel areas—where the problems are not in the cities but in the outlying areas. That is why I have become persuaded that a further necessary step is the creation of development agencies in some of the regions of England with a role comparable to that of the Scottish Development Agency and the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the support of north-west Members for a north-west development agency along the lines that he recommended in his excellent pamphlet "To Spur, Not to Mould"? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the budget of £600,000 for the north-west's existing agency Inward is meagre compared with the £90 million a year for the Scottish Development Agency?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the support that he and many other colleagues from assisted regions have given to the ideas which I developed in that pamphlet. The argument against setting up development agencies in the regions has always been not that we do not like what such development agencies do but that there is nothing that they can do that cannot be provided by some other public body in England — the Department of Trade and Industry, English Estates, new towns, the Manpower Services Commission, and so on. To a large extent, that is true but, as so often, it is not the whole truth. The proliferation of public bodies and departments, each with different powers and functions, is a real turn-off for industry. However much co-operation there is between them, the attractions of a one-stop shop are immense.

For all its remaining and substantial problems, Scotland has leapt ahead of several English regions. There are many reasons for that, but it is difficult to avoid concluding that the distinctively Scottish system of encouraging industrial development has played an important part. The key feature has been the SDA. Apart from the advantage of it being a one-stop shop, it has greater flexibility than the combination of institutions south of the border and east of Offa's dyke. By being able to shift in a particular case as well as to deploy all forms of assistance, that flexibility is of great advantage to industry.

I make no apology for the fact that the Conservative party was extremely anxious about the SDA and the WDA when they were created. It had reason to be so, because at that time the tide of state ownership was rising. That is no longer so. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, by changing the guidelines and the personnel running those institutions, have been able to allay the anxieties felt by the Scottish and Welsh Conservative parties.

In the case for development agencies in the English regions, one factor that is even more important than flexibility is the need to do something that will capture the imagination of people in the regions, not for political purposes but to stimulate growth and investment. The problems in the regions do not arise because of a lack of infrastructure, bad industrial relations or even lack of capital. Often they are caused by lack of confidence, an inherent pessimism which is the product of decades of decline. For that reason, I believe that a gesture of confidence, the creation of a regional focus in the setting up of development agencies, would stimulate industrial activity far more than the actual powers or levels of investment involved might lead one to expect. Let us not treat that as a panacea. It is one of many actions that must be taken on the supply side in relation to pay bargaining —a matter on which I have heard less enthusiasm from the Opposition for what I have said—and elsewhere.

It is just one further step along the road of progress. That is one road along which no one will be able to go far

unless—quite apart from the specific measures that we take to deal with regional matters—it is paved with the fiscally sound anti-inflationary policies which are the unique hallmarks of the Government's conduct of affairs.

8.38 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I regret the fact that time does not permit me to deal in detail with the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan). The parts when he dealt with Scotland showed that he knew little about the subject. His comments—he is not alone in this—revealed the problems that we suffer in Scotland. He was talking about the problems of the north-east. I have always been lectured that this is a unitary state and criticised for threatening the break-up of the United Kingdom. When some hon. Members talk about the north-east, they are talking about the north-east of England. The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) talked about the north-west. He did not mean my constituency, although it is in Britain; he meant the north-west of England. I knew long before I became a Member that Britain equalled England and that Scotland, Wales and Ireland were periphery colonies which did not matter all that much.

I want to comment on the terms of the motion. In the business of the House for the week, it was said that the motion for the debate would be:

"The Divided Nation — Failure of the Government's Economic Policies".

It is clear from today's Order Paper that we are discussing the Government's economic policies. Why the fudge by the Labour party? What has happened to the divided nation? I think that the official Opposition are just as keen as the Conservative Government to hide the facts about the divisions between the north and south. There is no word either in the motion about regional policies. Is it the intention of the Labour Opposition to soft-pedal in order to keep the south happy for votes?

What is certain is that there is a north-south divide. Everyone is aware that Scotland, Wales, Ireland the north-east and north-west of England and just recently the midlands are suffering. Certainly problems occur in a line from the Wash to the Severn. I know that there are areas of deprivation in the London area. I am also aware that there are areas of affluence in what is called the north. However, that does not alter the main argument, and any fair-minded observer would agred with the view of the editorial in *The Guardian* which stated:

"Britain is becoming two distinct economic nations—a prosperous south and a north in terminal decline."

It is not an answer simply to say that it is the old smokestack industries that are in decline. It is the duty of Government to assist in replacing those industries and they should do that with regional policies. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks that regional policy should not be the Cinderella of policies and he should draw that fact to the attention of the Government Front Bench.

It is not an answer to say that lower wages would attract new industries. The Low Pay Unit has demonstrated that the poorest paid areas are invariably those with the highest unemployment. An even more ominous factor for the Government is contained in the conclusion of *The Guardian* editorial:

"That economic divisions almost coincide with political allegiance. Nearly all of the heavy job losses have been in Labour voting areas (Scotland, Wales, the broad north) while job creations have been in the Tory-held prosperous south. Put cynically, the Government does not need to do much about this other Britain to stay in office."

That may rejoice the hearts of Tories in the short-term, but there are hidden time bombs.

At Question Time today the Prime Minister was still rejecting any talk of a north-south divide. However, there is now the available evidence of the census of unemployment. That evidence showed that 94 per cent. of jobs lost in Britain since June 1979 were north of a line from the Wash to the Bristol channel and only 6 per cent. in the relatively prosperous southern regions. Despite the caveats that have been put in about the north-south divide, can anybody deny that it exists? Job losses have proved that divide in the United Kingdom.

In the period from June 1979 to June 1986, Scotland lost 216,000 jobs. That conflicts with what the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks said about Scotland prospering. Since June 1986 the gap between Scotland and England has widened still further, with unemployment falling in England by 23,000 while it is still rising in Scotland where an extra 9,000 people have been put on the dole.

All this exposes the promises made, from time to time, by the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, who has now gone to the Ministry of Defence. He used to promise every year that Scotland's economy was on the turn. It also exposes the claim of the present Secretary of State that Scotland is leading the United Kingdom out of the depression. By God, if we are doing that the rest of the United Kingdom must be a poor soul.

The forecasts are not much better. The Mackay Consultants economic commentary forecasts that

"Scotland will suffer substantially from the fall in world oil prices. Obviously some firms and sectors will benefit from lower costs but these will be outweighed by the negative effects on the oil companies and the service companies directly involved in the North Sea."

The *Scottish Business Insider* magazine has found that the continuing erosion of control of enterprises within Scotland has occurred as a result of recent mergers and takeovers. That will have a serious effect on the country. It states that 53 per cent. of the total capital employed in the big manufacturing and industrial sectors has been lost through takeovers of Scottish-owned companies. The divide is only too real.

The answer for Scotland, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) and myself have pointed out, is independence. A Scottish Assembly would find the pull of London too powerful. Norway, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland have the lowest rates of unemployment in the world. It is that league, not as a deprived region of the United Kingdom, that Scotland's survival obliges us to join.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: May I remind the House that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman will seek to catch my eye at 9.20 pm.

8.45 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I represent a constituency with acute social problems of high unemployment and chronic economic difficulties of structural imbalance. I hope that the House will understand why I will concentrate on the region's economic issues and the so-called north-south divide.

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

Let me join with others, especially my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), in dispelling two myths. The first myth, which is the most dangerous, is that there is no regional problem. Anyone can prove anything if they select their facts sufficiently ruthlessly, but that can have no credibility in the north and should have no credibility in the south.

The second myth is that of the north-south divide. It dramatically appeals to the newspaper headline writers who are keen to sell second rate newspapers and to Opposition politicians who are keen to sell second rate policies. It is a simplistic and sweeping interpretation of the regional problems and does no service to the people who are suffering from those problems. Indeed, this simplistic portrayal is distortive and insulting. Its innuendo is that anyone north of the Wash is second best, downtrodden, helpless and hopeless. That is a travesty and a typical piece of patronising Socialism.

How on earth can the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) ever hope that the industry and investment which are seriously needed in the north-east can be attracted to that region if he pursues the tactics that he used when he talked about the north-east as if it was in the blackest possible situation, coming out with the whole issue of statistics and trying to prove that the situation was irredeemably hopeless? Frankly, his motive defeats me. It was a studied insult to those people who are trying to attract jobs and investment to the region by portraying the positive benefits, but the hon. Gentleman did not touch on those benefits. Let us talk about the positive side.

Unemployment in the north-east is now clearly and consistently falling, thanks to the Government's policies. In my constituency—a typical example—unemployment is now lower than it was in 1983. The old industries are being replaced and urban dereliction reversed. There are now new industries and investments which are being attracted to the area. The hon. Member for Stockton, South is obviously aware of the many good companies that have invested in the north-east in the past few years. Wealth is being created and as high a quality of life can be enjoyed there as anywhere else.

The region has an unparalleled number of attractions. Housing is of high quality but low price compared with elsewhere. Land is readily available for industrial development and there is a skilled work force ready to take the jobs. There are also many environmental attractions. Specific examples include 10,000 jobs that have been created by the Newcastle and Gateshead Enterprise zone. The massive Metro retail development—the biggest in Europe—has brought over 5,000 jobs. There is the great success of the Nissan plant that is already ahead of schedule with promises that 100,000 vehicles a year will roll off its production line in four years' time. Komatsu at Birtley has brought another 270 jobs; Barbour at Hebburn has created 100 jobs; Brown and Root at Jarrow, 117 jobs; and British Rail at Heaton has brought 180 jobs. Those jobs are connected with the east coast rail electrification, and that should win the support of the Opposition who are always talking about infrastructure development.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Merchant: I shall give way in a minute.

These are all examples from the last few months of jobs that have been created in the north-east. Two or three years ago, the Port of Tyne Authority made a regular loss of £750,000. It has now made a profit of £3 million. That is an important indicator of economic activity on the Tyne and in the north-east generally. It is not all gloom and doom.

Mr. Thompson: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that one third of the 83,000 young people in the north of England who are unemployed have not had a job in the last 12 months? They will not find any comfort in the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Merchant: I should have thought that there was much comfort in the north-east for those youngsters who, unfortunately, have not had jobs made readily available to them in the last few years. The Government have done a great deal for them. They have provided training opportunities and MSC schemes. I accept that only real and lasting jobs will result in real benefit, but the statistics demonstrate that real jobs are now coming to the north-east.

There is now great hope, but there are real problems. First, there is the social problem of unemployment, caused by the collapse of many traditional smokestack industries, the lack of competitiveness 10 or 20 years ago, caused by poor management and adverse labour attitudes, and the past lack of enterprise and investment and poor education and training.

Secondly, there has been structural inadequacy and a historic over-dependence on old, heavy industries. That has not yet been properly corrected. Thirdly, there is the problem of two-way labour immobility. Barriers have prevented managers and investors from moving to the north with their companies. Other hurdles have prevented employees from exercising their choice to move south to take up jobs. I shall deal with the latter point first, because it threatens to be the most serious problem. Certainly it is the most recent problem, and the Government must take urgent steps to tackle it.

Ironically, it is a function of the Government's success in economic terms that fast recovery and growth has taken place in the south-east. High and fast rising property prices in the south attract people both ways and inhibit the free operation of the market mechanism in regional and labour terms. These high prices are exacerbated by Government subsidies, hidden and otherwise, to housing and transport in the south-east. The north desperately needs the excess jobs of the south. It needs the companies and the investment that are locked near London. Northerners need the freedom to find homes in London, if they wish to move.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Is my hon. Friend aware that there are 120,000 empty council houses in all parts of the country and that thousands more council properties are hard to let or are impossible to let? Would he favour a national, computerised system so that any job seeker could go to any housing department in the country, tap into a terminal and see what is available in the region to which he wishes to move?

Mr. Merchant: That is an excellent suggestion. It would unfreeze the current rigid system of council house allocations.

We must free the housing transfer process by encouraging more low paid housing in the south, thus

reducing the speed of the price rise, while encouraging a high quality of environment and lower living costs—items like domestic rates—in the north. The advantages of the regions must be sold far more effectively.

Mr. Clelland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Merchant: No, I shall not allow any other hon. Member to intervene, because time is short and I want other hon. Members to have the opportunity to speak.

In overcoming the historic image of the north, we must take firmer steps to diversify and modernise the industrial base of regions like the north-east. The Government deserve credit for what they have done. There have been some outstanding successes, but more incentives are needed. Grant aid is a great advantage, but that alone is not sufficient. Tax breaks, too, are essential. A uniform business rate must be introduced swiftly, as high rates in the north-east, particularly in the north, which includes the highest rated authority in England, have strangled local industry.

Next, basic income tax rates must continue downwards. The lower the rate the better. A 20 per cent. basic rate would do wonders for the north. Every example throughout the world illustrates that. The Government must continue to concentrate on simple tax reduction, or must enable depressed areas to benefit from a differential advantage — as, in a sense, the enterprise zone philosophy pursues.

Planning constraints, too, must be lifted, especially in depressed areas. How often we hear of companies that are keen to invest but then have to wait weeks or months as planners pontificate and councillors interfere before they all say no. That is why I welcome the creation of the new Tyneside urban development corporation. It will have the power and the drive to overcome the inertia within some local government organisations.

When it comes to direct Government employment and procurement, a lead must be given. There must be an appreciation of regional aspects. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks, who drew attention to the importance of having two approaches to regional policy, not just the classic one and not just the supply side approach, either. I do not believe that the Government have done enough to devolve Departments and state industries and to direct employment to the north. Therefore, the people who make the decisions remain in London, with a myopic metropolitan view of matters.

Furthermore, when it comes to Government orders, the Government must appreciate that, whether they like it or not, their purchasing power is so great that they cannot ignore the regional aspect. I am not making a case for subsidy, or unwanted orders for old industries. Indeed, attempts to prop them up are bound to be counterproductive and a cruel deception. However, there are industries that desperately need orders. To place those orders could dramatically alter their position and that of the local economy.

As an example, let me take NEI Parsons, a large and highly successful turbine generator manufacturer. NEI, in Newcastle, is modern, forward-looking and vibrant. It is a growth company. It has an excellent management team, forward-looking and positive union leadership and a fully committed record of high investment and productivity, yet within the last fortnight it has declared 800 redundancies, partly because of the delay in domestic power station orders. This company does not ask for subsidies or for preferential orders. It is quite happy to stand by fair competition in the market place. It prefers fair competition. However, it needs orders to be available. There is a need for orders and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take this point to his right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), who on this matter has, I believe, been inert and complacent and who seems to be more worried about cranky rural pressure groups than about industrial jobs in northern Britain.

Mr. Bernard Conlan (Gateshead, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Merchant: I fear that, because of time, I cannot give way. I hope that I have addressed the points that are of concern to the hon. Gentleman.

However, nothing can compare with the sheer incapacity and the staggering incapability of the Labour bosses who have controlled the destiny of the north-east for more than half a century. Over this period, a Neanderthal attitude to economics, a Stalin-like obsession with central control and a fossilised self-view have catapulted this region backwards at a time when a pragmatic grasp of the opportunities available could have heralded a new era.

Mr. Conlan *rose*——

Mr. Merchant: Faced with the NEI redundancies, all that the Labour city council in Newcastle could do—and I fear that it reveals Labour's industrial policies nationally, too—was to waste yet further resources upon producing a boringly tedious and second-rate report and then to prepare a leaflet drop to every house in Newcastle, telling them what they knew already. However, it did not remind them of the NEI's rates bill of £2·1 million a year, which the city council levied, and the burden that that placed on the company. It is time that the Labour party faced reality and acknowledged that it has prolonged and wallowed in the concept of the north-south divide. When it had its chance, it did nothing to allay it. That is the reality that this House ought to be aware of, and it is the reality that people in the north of England know only too well.

8.59 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Other hon. Members have dealt with the broader aspects of this issue, but time demands that I should concentrate on regional and constituency issues. But some of the matters that have come up during the course of this debate have to be dealt with before I move on to talk about my region and constituency.

I agree with many Members that we are not necessarily talking about a north-south divide in the debate this evening. What we are talking about is a divide in this country between those who have and those who have not. Since the Government have been in power, that divide has grown even wider. In the majority of cases it is a north-south divide—although there is a substantial area to the west—but it would be wrong of us to polarise the issue into those geographical areas when there are high pockets of unemployment in areas such as Margate and Ramsgate in the south-east of England. There are areas of poverty in the south-west and other parts of the southern half of

[Mr. Allan Rogers]

this country. The argument is not about the north versus the south. It is about the rich versus the poor and the haves versus the have-nots.

No one can argue that there are not difficulties in the regions, because manifestly there are big differences whatever parameter or socio-economic indicator is used. These are problems of the past, as the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said, but they are not only the problems of the past, or the decline of the smokestack industries. If we look quickly at one statistic in regard to Wales, for example, the coal industry has had a job loss of about 13,000 people since 1979. But the number of unemployed in Wales has risen by over 100,000. One cannot blame the decline of the coal industry for the enormous increase in unemployment in Wales. Unemployment is a difficult problem that will not be solved by one simple action. It will take all the resources of Government, private industry and the public sector working together in an effective partnership to solve the problem. But it can be solved and I shall not get involved with the prophets of despair who are writing off areas such as the area that I represent.

The right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) talked about these regional differences. In one part of his speech he seemed to accept that they existed, but in the other part he did not want to accept them. Part of his panacea for the problems that are arising—I think I quote him rightly—was that "there should be regional pay bargaining." I should like to point out to the right hon. and learned Member—at least, I would if he were present — that those regional pay differences presently exist. We do not need regional pay bargaining, and it is wrong of Conservative Members to say that workers price themselves out of jobs; that is manifestly not so. The difference in average wages between areas such as Wales and the south-east at the present time is £42·32. One can hardly accuse the Welsh of pricing themselves out of jobs.

I represent an area that is one of the most socially and economically deprived areas in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) helped me by providing some statistics, and I shall catalogue them in the hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Paymaster General will pay attention to the problems within my constituency. In my area we have the highest number of houses without indoor toilet facilities; the highest number of houses without a bath or shower; the highest number of pensioners lacking the same facilities; a perinatal mortality rate that is the highest in Wales; an unemployment rate of over 20 per cent.; an extraordinarily high level of youth unemployment; more likelihood of children suffering from measles and whooping cough; and, not surprisingly, the highest percentage of permanently sick people in the United Kingdom. That is a catalogue of deprivation.

But the statistics do not adequately demonstrate the misery and poverty in which some individuals live in my constituency and in areas in the north and in the soutn that are suffering from unemployment. They do not illustrate the struggles and difficulties of pensioners to achieve a reasonable quality of life. They do not adequately demonstrate the tragedy and disappointment of the young mother who loses a baby in the early days of the baby's life because of a lack of facilities. They do not demonstrate the despair and disillusionment of a young man who has never had a job and has no likelihood of getting one in the foreseeable future. *[Interruption.]* I wish that hon. Members who have just come into the Chamber would listen quietly.

The Government amendment talks about the success of their economic policies and of healthy, balanced economic growth. We are entitled to ask the Paymaster General to tell us when he replies where that growth and success is and when we in Wales will have some share of it. We would certainly like to have some of it in my county and in my constituency.

The Chancellor, the Paymaster General, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Prime Minister constantly reiterate their excuses for unemployment. As I said earlier, they blame the decline of the coal industry for the problems that we face in south Wales, but our problems are much deeper seated than a simple decline in one industry. If we look across the job spectrum, we see that in manufacturing we have lost 113,000 jobs. In metal goods engineering and vehicles 52,000 jobs have been lost. Across the whole spectrum of industry we see that jobs have been lost. It is not simply the coal industry that is in decline; it is a region in decline and that region badly needs help. We are not pricing ourselves out of work. If the Government attach any importance at all to jobs in the engineering sector, they should help areas such as south Wales.

Earlier, I spoke about the statistics of my constituency which reflect the position in Mid-Glamorgan and Wales as a whole. I described what they meant for the pensioner, the young mother and the unemployed youngster. They mean despair, disappointment, disillusion, struggle, difficulty, and, in many cases, tragedy. That is mirrored elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is the true meaning of Thatcherism. That is the true reality of Thatcher's Britain today. It is a divided Britain, governed by an uncaring Government.

9.8 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Not the least interesting aspect of the debate which is now coming to a close has been the distinct switch of emphasis that we have seen in the attempted assault of the Opposition Front Bench on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and on the Government's record. Obviously, they have a major concern with unemployment, as we all do, and that has been reflected in many of the speeches. But they seem to be sensing that, now that my right hon. Friends are beginning to grapple effectively with unemployment and we are seeing the figures behave in a far more encouraging way, they must have a new theme. The theme that they have found is reflected in their motion on the Order Paper. It is the theory of the impending balance of payments crisis.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has gone into the economic forecasting business. It is only fair to warn him before the debate is out that that is a hazardous business. It is all the more hazardous when he and his right hon. and hon. Friends appear to depend so heavily on independent forecasters in the much criticised City, as they do. They seem to refer again and again to what independent forecasters are saying about trade deficits, interest rates and sterling in the

coming year and what that will do to our employment performance and the social problems that we face in the inner cities that we have been discussing this afternoon.

The difficulty is that at least half the independent forecasters have so far been spectacularly wrong. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should keep that in mind. They were quite wrong about interest rates in the autumn which they confidently forecast would go up by 4 percentage points but did not. There was then a forecast that there would be a huge sterling crisis this month, but, of course, there has been nothing of the kind. I do not know whether the Labour party associated itself with that forecast. There have been other problems which I shall deal with in a moment, but there certainly has not been the collapse or the further slide in sterling that was predicted.

There was equal puzzlement and a failure to appreciate what would happen about labour unit costs. If I may say so, that error was apparent on both Front Benches and there was a cry that we would all be ruined by an enormous rise in labour unit costs that would offset the devaluation of sterling against the deutschmark. It was said that that would mean we would not restore competition or create new jobs, but the opposite has happened and once again the forecasters have got it wrong. Labour unit costs are coming under increasingly effective control and the original statistics about output and recorded labour costs were probably grossly inaccurate and are becoming increasingly so. Even if they were accurate, those same figures are developing in a far more favourable way.

We could be seeing something that over the last 20 years many of us doubted could happen, a devaluation or depreciation taking place without consequent inflation and without the inflation of wage costs which wipes it out. I have never supported the proposition that we can devalue our way into competition and more jobs and by that means can restore jobs and opportunities to the north and to our cities. In America one hears people say, "If only we could get the dollar down, everything would be all right." I say to such people that we have tried that in Britain and quite often it did not work. It worked briefly in 1966, perhaps, but on the whole it is a path to perdition and always inflation takes away the advantage.

It may just be that as a result of supply side changes taking place in our economy this time the depreciation will stick and, because labour unit costs are not going up, it may be that we have reached the point—an important turning point—when we are able to take advantage of a lower and more competitive currency and fairly pour our efforts into competition and export and provide the new jobs that we need, especially in the areas about which hon. Members feel strongly. The economists were wrong when they thought that labour unit costs were going through the ceiling. Hon. Members in the centre parties were muttering about incomes policies of bizarre kinds which would control this problem. Suddenly we see once again that analysis was wrong.

The second major area in which the independent forecasters upon which the Labour party has relied so heavily have been wrong has been the staggering growth in invisible earnings. If one looks back to the forecasts one finds that none of these independent forecasters or Opposition critics at all foresaw what was happening. There was a widespread myth, shared by many commentators, that North sea oil had been wasted. That was an easy thing to say and an easy myth to peddle. People had not noticed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South, (Sir W. Clark) said earlier, that North sea oil proceeds were not being wasted.

Oil proceeds were being invested on a gigantic scale, largely, I concede, overseas, but as a result they are producing the most enormous annuity for Britain which can be invested in the competitive and high technology industries of tomorrow. As a result, Britain has become not a debtor nation like the United States but the world's second largest creditor nation after Japan and is in a position of immense potential power which will enable us to use those resources to solve our social problems and to underpin the new and more dynamic industries that we need for tomorrow.

That is another area where the economists got it all wrong. The independent forecasters did not forecast any of that. Instead, they looked at the current physical trade balance and saw ahead disaster, to which they eagerly assented. What we will see is a considerable offset in annuity which will flow in on a gigantic scale, possibly rising to £14 billion a year by 1990. That means that the trade problems which will inevitably arise when the oil runs down and when we have a slightly weaker oil price can be handled and are being handled.

The third thing that economists and critics of the Government did not foresee was the enormous rise in non-oil revenues which are now benefiting my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and enabling him now to talk about the possibility of an undershoot for public sector borrowing this year and, in my view, a possible undershoot next year as well. That will give a leeway in our budgetary practice without imprudence, which we have not known for a generation. My own strong view is that in a sense an undershoot is not a good thing, but without a doubt the leeway should be used. It is not good budgetary practice to achieve an undershoot, not least because in Whitehall the word goes out that pressure is off public spending and we can now put aside all those troublesome efficiency drives and all the rest. I hope that there will not be an undershoot and that the space will be used up by a judicious use of resources.

In my book, and I have never disguised this, we should concentrate, for social and economic and job reasons, on tax cuts. I cannot understand the view of the Opposition. I can understand the view of the more blinkered members of the Opposition but not the more sensible members when they are against tax cuts on low incomes. What are they talking about? Do they not listen to their own constituents or understand the enormous disincentives working on those on low incomes who have to pay some of the highest taxes and national insurance in the Western world? Have they not read the stories around the world of those nations and states where low taxes have produced fantastic growth in jobs? Have they not noticed that in California, a state with half the population of Britain, 2 million new jobs have been produced while taxes have been cut by 23 per cent.? The tax cut opportunity must be seized, not least because our competitors, the United States, Japan, Germany and France, are all going for major tax cuts and tax reform and changes in their structure.

If we do not follow that route, we will be disastrously left behind in terms of creating jobs in the inner cities and the areas in the north where we must get them back. If hon. Members say that we should not have tax cuts now because it will increase consumption and suck in imports —and I do not believe it will—if that is the fear, let us

[Mr. David Howell]

go for the sort of tax cuts that encourage personal ownership and investment and savings. Let us copy the ideas of the Loi Monory in France and have front end relief for saving and transfer from State saving, which has on the whole been disastrously inefficient to personal ownership and personal saving which can be mobilised for the new industries and new jobs which we need. There is plenty for my right hon. Friends to do in that area on capital taxes and on all levels, basic rate tax and higher rate tax as well. Taking the example of capital transfer tax, in real terms, in the form of its inheritance tax, that is now higher than in 1974 when it came in. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bring that back to the level it was at when the Labour party introduced it.

Finally, as it has come into the debate in the motion on BTR, although that matter has been resolved, and I am glad it has been, I believe the Secretary of State was totally and utterly right in the line he took. I congratulate him on keeping his head and on keeping calm when those about him were losing theirs. I was glad to see that he stuck to the competition definition in his ruling. I was dismayed to see reports that some of the junior Ministers in the Department of Industry seemed to be putting distance between themselves and him. I hope that is not correct, that the newspaper reports were misleading and that the Ministers concerned will explain themselves. I believe that my right hon. Friend is entirely right. I did not like the ominous suggestion of some hon. Members that we should redefine a new idea of public interest for controlling mergers. We know where that idea goes, towards more bureaucratic vetting of mergers, back to the world of the IRC and all the monopolies and mergers which were put together in a spirit of rationalisation in this country with catastrophic results. We are living with them today.

The British Motor Corporation merger with Leyland was a classic example of alleged public interest prevailing over competitive forces. We do not want to go back to that kind of thing. I believe that we may be looking at the wrong end of the problem altogether. In America, they are terrified of mergers and I think that there is a merger mania as well. The answer probably is to look at the excessive ease with which people can raise capital to conduct these takeover raids, the world of jump bonds, leverage buy-outs and the rest. It may be that the view should be focused at the capital raising end to see if there is not an excessive ease for people, often of not the highest repute, to raise capital and raid much larger concerns. Policy should be concentrated on that end of the process rather than on worrying about the consequences at the other end. If the capital access side is cured and the financing of takeovers is better managed, the consequences will be much more satisfactory and we will not be left with the sort of rows that we have had over BTR and Pilkington.

I said at the beginning that the impending crisis thesis was put forward by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. In one sense the right hon. Gentleman might be right; there might be an impending crisis, not in this country—we are in a stronger position than we have been for a generation to meet the rough seas of the world—but in America. We may see there a real disaster—a crash landing for the dollar, a huge hike in interest rates and vast currency instabilities. All that could produce a crisis, but my right hon. Friend has built for us an economy that is stronger to face world difficulties than for many years past.

9.20 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Mr. Speaker, you have given me exactly one minute. I should like to say thanks; had I more time I would say, thank you very much.

That the only representative from the North of Ireland—the region with the highest rate of unemployment, the highest cost of electricity, gas, coal and food, and the lowest rate of wages — is allowed a one-minute contribution to the debate convinces me that the motion, which says that the economic situation has led to a divided nation, is right. Indeed, I might conclude that it is an ill-divided nation.

9.21 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): It is sometimes said that the difficulty with the Government is not so much their policy as the way in which they present it. Time without number, speakers, particularly at Conservative party conferences, tell us that. I am afraid that in the case of the Chancellor of the Exchequer it appears to be both. Today he was asked in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) about what some people regard as a minor point but what many people in the regions, particularly industrialists, regard as important—the moratorium which has been imposed upon the payment of regional development grants. The Chancellor replied that there was not a moratorium, merely a delay in payment.

To check the matter, I looked at volume II of the public expenditure White Paper. On the front it says:

"Presented to Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer".

What did I find? At page 93 it says:

"In order to spread this expenditure"—

that is, RDG expenditure—

"further moratoria have been imposed on payments of RDG, to cover new RDG as well as old."

If that is not a moratorium——

Mr. Lawson: It is a delay in payment.

Mr. Smith: Ah, it is a delay in payment. I have obviously got it wrong again. I must try harder. Try as I must to say that this is not a moratorium, when I go back to consider the figures I find that the Chancellor unfortunately told Parliament in the document that was presented to us last week:

"further moratoria have been imposed".

That seems to be a classic case of failing to present the case properly.

When we think about it, what is the difference between a moratorium and a delay in payment? Is not a moratorium no more and no less than a delay in payment? What is the Chancellor of the Exchequer trying to tell us when he says that it is not a moratorium but merely a delay in payment? I should be delighted to give way to the Chancellor if he would like to get to his feet and tell us the significant difference between a moratorium and a delay in payment. If there is a significant difference, significant enough for him to make such a point about it, it is time we knew what the difference is. If there is no difference, what on earth was he saying to my hon. Friend the

Member for Workington? I do not see the Chancellor dashing forward to elucidate that point, but I think he should try a little harder. That is not a minor point——

Mr. Lawson: I was anxious, for the sake of the House and also for the sake of business and industry and, indeed, the areas, that they should not have thought that there was a period during which applications would not be accepted —*[Interruption.]* That was what I was making quite clear to the House.

Mr. Smith: That would be a moratorium on applications. Unfortunately, the White Paper says: "further moratoria have been imposed on payments". Therefore, the Chancellor's explanation will not do. It is disgraceful if the Chancellor does not know that it applies to people who have applied for and properly been given grants. Those people have already qualified, been told that they will get the grant and conducted their business on that basis. However, suddenly out of the blue comes a moratorium, a loss of or delay in payment, and they are told that they cannot get the grant.

I refer to an article in the *Glasgow Herald* on 15 January 1987 on the reaction of one industrialist, Mr. Bill Miller, the managing director of an electronics company and the vice-chairman of the CBI in Scotland. He said that the additional delay would mean an overdraft for him of £200,000, and that it would stop the recruitment for three jobs in his company. He said that that would be repeated all round the country. Perhaps the next time that the Chancellor considers regional development grants, he will think a little more carefully about them.

While I am on the subject——

Mr. Lawson: I was absolutely accurate.

Mr. Smith: The Chancellor has indicated that he is not going to think any more about the matter because he says that he was absolutely accurate. However, I am not sure about that.

Mr. Brittan: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to be accurate and fair, will he point out that that is because expenditure on regional development grant has increased—*[Interruption.]*—as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made absolutely clear, in the sense that it is greater than that set out in the plans? The right hon. and learned Gentleman should welcome that.

Mr. Smith: I must not blame the Chancellor for his right hon. and learned Friend's intervention, because I am determined to be fair.

The notion that there has been an increase in regional development grants and that that has caused the problem can be assessed in the light of the following information. In 1982, regional development grants amounted to £812 billion. By 1986, that had been almost halved, to £396 billion. It has been projected to go down to £187 billion.

Mr. Brittan: That is entirely unworthy of the right hon. and learned Gentleman because he knows perfectly well that I was talking about the planned expenditure for the relevant year, which has been increased. He will get nowhere with tricks and twisting of that kind.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not allow me to finish what I was about to say before he interrupted me again. I am anxious that the House gets all the facts and not just the facts that he wishes the House to hear.

I should make it clear that regional development grants were halved between 1982 and 1986 and that they will be halved again. The Government should not say that they are surprised at the job losses in the regions and that manufacturing industry is failing when money is being pulled out on such a scale.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I shall not give way because I can handle only one intervention at a time.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that there is a problem because there is an old scheme and a new scheme and that there is a slight increase in expenditure because the old scheme overlaps the new scheme. If that is not what he said, it is what the Treasury told me when I asked, and that is probably as good a source as any. If this slight bulge is to be the reason for imposing a moratorium, one would have thought that the sensible thing would be just to pay the money to which people are entitled.

I shall leave the Chancellor of the Exchequer shortly. However, in the debate he told my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that he should have read the Brown report on the influence on income tax because it was in the Library. Taking the Chancellor at his word, I went to the Library and was told that not only is it not there, but that there is no record of it having been deposited there.

Hon. Members: Apologise.

Mr. Lawson: I have nothing to apologise for. The Library and I regret that it made a slight error which I shall come to in a moment. *[Laughter.]* The document was sent by hand to the Library on 18 December. When I heard that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had been unable to find it, I inquired of the Deputy Librarian what had happened. I have a letter from him, apologising to me for the fact that the Library had put it in the statistical section of the Library.

Mr. Smith: I am glad — [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] Faced with such overwhelming evidence, I have to withdraw the statement. However, the fact remains that when I went to the Library I could not get the document, so I am not gaining from this. Perhaps the solution is that the person who sent it to the Library said that there should be a moratorium on its being made available to the House.

At the heart of the Government's case has been an increase in productivity. They cannot say that there has been an increase in jobs in manufacturing industry, because we have lost 2 million jobs there, nor that there has been an increase in output, because it is still 4 per cent. below the 1979 level.

Mr. Lawson: It is not.

Mr. Smith: It is.

Mr. Lawson: Manufacturing output is.

Mr. Smith: Manufacturing output, then: we have got that right. The Chancellor agrees that manufacturing output is still 4 per cent. below what it was in 1979. We are told that that is all right because of an increase in productivity, but let us get one matter absolutely clear: anyone can achieve an increase in nominal labour productivity, if in a declining industrial economy job losses over the same period are even greater than the fall in

[Mr. Smith]

output. Therefore, the Government have merely managed to ensure that output has not fallen so calamitously as jobs. For that reason there is an underlying growth in productivity. Productivity in a declining industrial economy such as ours is not what we want. We want increased productivity in an expanding industrial economy, and that we certainly have not had.

The proper indices in this matter are employment, output, investment and trade balance. They are far more important than this bogus productivity figure. The employment figure has decreased by 2 million, manufacturing jobs have decreased by 28 per cent., manufacturing output has decreased by 4 per cent., manufacturing investment has decreased 17 per cent. since 1979, the manufacturing trade balance was in surplus to the tune of £5 billion in 1980 and the figure for 1986 is estimated to be £7·5 billion. It is not merely a matter of a deficit of £7·5 billion, but of problems with the new industries.

If the Chancellor considers the figures, he will discover that between 1979 and 1986, 211,000 jobs were lost in the electronic and electrical engineering industries. Well over 200,000 jobs have been lost in the new industries as well as in the old. As the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should know, if he pays attention to these matters, there is a serious balance of trade deficit in the high-tech industries as well as in others.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should have been replying to the debate. When we have a debate on regional policy and manufacturing industry, his place is at the Dispatch Box. We understand that he cannot involve himself with one half of his Department because of an interest through his family connections. However, he should not disable himself from the other half of his Department through non-interest in the House. It is his duty to answer such debates. I hope that on the next occasion that we debate manufacturing industry and regional policy, he will be present—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is here now."] He may be present now, and it might be helpful if we could have a contribution from him as he is responsible to Parliament.

Some hon. Members have queried whether the north-south divide, which has taken hold of the public imagination in recent weeks, exists. People will argue for ever about that. I want to consider a Government document—the submission to the regional development fund. That document can be found in the Library if one asks for it. However, the Government will not publish it. The only way to get anything from the document is to make a photocopy of the copy in the Library. I would not say that that was a symptom of the open society or a way of disseminating information, but if one is industrious enough and prepared to waste public money on the photocopiers information can be obtained.

The most important fact in the document is that unemployment in 1990, on the projection made to the European development fund, will be 3,117,000. What is all this nonsense about unemployment falling when in 1990, according to the Government document, unemployment will be above 3 million? That is only three years from now. Either the figure is wrong, in which case the Government are telling lies to the European Community, or it is correct. It is a forbidding prospect that in 1990 there will be more than 3 million unemployed on the basis of the Government's figures.

To support the Government's submission, the document recounts details of the various regions. It states about the west midlands:

"There is little prospect of an improvement in the region's basic unemployment problems between now and 1990."

About Scotland it says:

"Little possibility of sufficient expansion."

About Yorkshire and Humberside it states:

"Employment levels are unlikely to rise in the short or the medium term."

With regard to Wales it states:

"Overall economic activity lower than any other region of Great Britain and expected to remain so during the period to 1990."

With regard to the north-west, it states:

"Prospects for reducing unemployment are frighteningly bleak."

Mr. Philip Oppenheim: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I simply do not have time to give way.

That is the Government's assessment of the north-south divide. Faced with that, the Minister must not tell us that there is no north-south divide. Let him not tell us that there have not been significant job losses in each of those areas.

Since 1979, in manufacturing industry 281,000 jobs have been lost in the west midlands; 109,000 have been lost in the east midlands; 248,000 in Yorkshire and Humberside; 337,000 in the north-west; 140,000 in the north; 115,000 in Wales; and 132,000 in Scotland. That is a total of 1·5 million in those regions.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim *rose*—

Mr. Smith: It is not simply a north-south problem. Opposition Members who represent inner-city areas of London know perfectly well the serious problems that exist in the south. It ill becomes Conservative Members to remind us of that. Hon. Members who represent Luton and Swindon know perfectly well the serious problems that exist in manufacturing industry.

Some 476,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry in the south. There is a north-south problem. However, overlying that there is the desperate problem of the decline of our manufacturing industry. That has been accentuated, because the Government have simultaneously withdrawn regional support and regions intertwined with industry have borne the brunt of the damage. However, all Britain has suffered. We are all diminished by the north-south divide and we are all impoverished by our industrial society.

That is why one of the greatest sins of the Government is to have turned their back on manufacturing industry. Where did they turn to? They turned to cast their favours on the City. I understand that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said in a television programme today that the Labour party did not even contemplate legislating about insider dealing. That suggestion has certainly been made on a number of occasions—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) will forgive me if I put the matter straight. I have to remind the House that the Labour party produced provisions for insider dealing in the Companies Bill 1978. The Bill did not reach the statute book because a general election intervened and the Conservative party would not agree to let the Bill go through—*[Interruption.]* The proof is

that the same provisions appeared in the Companies Act 1980 initiated by the Conservative Government, and are now law.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: In the short time I have available, I can say merely that the City is racked by many scandals. We heard today from the Chancellor that there is activity by Morgan Grenfell and that the Bank of England is taking a close supervisory role. It is clear that the management of Morgan Grenfell will have to change substantially and that it will have to change its courses and priorities. I suggest that it stops paying £20,000 to the Conservative party. That would be a good start to its change of policy and direction.

In the debate on the Companies Bill in 1974 the Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"I wonder whether insider dealing . . . is such an abuse as is supposed by many right hon. and hon. Gentlemen. It could have some beneficial effects. If a company were to continue to conceal some catastrophe . . . or some great turn-up for the books made it a great deal of money, and this news was suddenly released, the change in the share price would be dramatic. But if there is some half knowledge of this event and buying and selling takes place, the change in the value of the shares will be moderate, with possibly beneficial consequences."—[*Official Report*, 17 January, 1974; Vol. 867, c. 983.]

I do not put that forward as a strong argument but it could be used for saying that a little knowledge of the affairs of companies leaking out is a good thing. That was the prevailing view of the Conservative party until recently. The Government are acting on the City because they have to. The Government need to take much tougher action and I hope that they will not resist doing so.

Above all, we condemn the Government for dividing us, for impoverishing us and for not showing the responsibility which a former Prime Minister called for today but which I do not think the Government will be ever able to show.

9.43 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has just replied to what was billed as—*[Interruption.]* With his usual skill and wit, he took the first 10 minutes of his speech in this major debate arguing about a footnote in the White Paper about a delay on payments on regional policy. He then had a discussion about where in the Library it was possible to find a copy of a particularly readable report that was commissioned by the previous Labour Government. He then moved briefly through a discussion on a long-published document about regional development grants and wound up with his great defence about how in 1979 the Labour party had actually introduced a Bill dealing with insider trading, which was not a criminal offence during their period of office. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the Companies Bill 1973, which sought to make insider trading a criminal offence was dropped because of the 1974 election. The Labour party did absolutely nothing about it until, as a death bed conversion, it produced a Bill in 1979 which fell at the election, so we promptly introduced the legislation upon which we are now relying. With that last, totally fallacious piece of City bashing, we saw the end of the Opposition's case, which as my hon. Friends will have noticed, did not include one word of policy on the north-south divide, the City, or anything else. That was the Opposition's case.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East overran the time that was allocated to him in dealing with all that stuff. It is obvious that, having to put off this debate last week, having tried to turn it into a debate on Pilkington—which is why the Opposition said that my right hon. Friend should reply to it, and bearing in mind that the Pilkington issue is finished — Opposition Members are trying to talk it out. They actually asked for it. I remind them that, when it was first envisaged, the debate—I am as puzzled as the right hon Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) as to why it was asked for—followed the great Shadow Cabinet meeting that was meant to presage the pre-election attack on the economy and unemployment. Out of that Shadow Cabinet meeting we were supposed to hear the Opposition's economic policies. There was not a word. Only one word of Labour policy has emerged from the debate, and that was the most astonishing commitment by the man who wants to be the next Chancellor of the Exchequer. He will put up taxation if we reduce it. That is the only statement that we have heard today on what is meant to be a serious economic and employment issue.

I propose to deal, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle on Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) and others wanted to deal, with the alleged north-south divide that was trailed before the debate actually started. Of course we all accept that there is a marked difference between the economic and industrial life of the north and the south of England. There always has been—it is nothing new—and there always will be—*[Interruption.]*—a difference in the way of life. Of course we all believe in some regional distinctions.

During the debate we have been concerned, first, with arriving at a more sensible definition of the problem. Hon. Members, apart from Opposition Front Bench Members, have accepted that there is a far more complicated pattern of pockets of relative deprivation and problems alongside pockets of great prosperity. Parts of the north are exceedingly prosperous, and so are parts of the south. But we cannot walk around the streets of Peckham and tell people that the problems of employment are confined entirely to the northern industrial cities. They are quite large areas. Their economic activities differ. Unemployment in Clitheroe in Lancashire stands at 5·2 per cent. Unemployment in Thanet in Kent stands at 20 per cent. Obviously, we must tackle those differences, and those are the things that we are tackling.

Where there is a regional difference, and undoubtedly there is, it arises because, as most hon. Members who seriously addressed themselves to the problem have conceded, there has been a change following the reduction in employment in traditional heavy industries. Opposition Members have sought to express the view that the decline in employment occurred, for the most part, in those areas which, in the past, depended most on heavy traditional industry.

Mr. Allan Rogers: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way. I have used almost all my time.

[Mr. Clarke]

That decline has taken place most heavily in places that were most dependent on heavy traditional industry. This fall in employment in manufacturing industry has been taking place in the Western world. The loss of jobs in manufacturing industry was faster in the late 1960s and early 1970s than it is now. The reason why it was so severe in 1979, 1980 and 1981 was that we inherited over-manned and uncompetitive heavy traditional industry, so the fall became most marked.

Out of that, the Opposition tried to construct the north-south divide. As Opposition Members often do, they turned to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to produce an analysis of an article in the *Department of Employment Gazette* to try to reveal new facts to support their case. No hon. Member could explain how the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East arrived at his conclusion that 94 per cent. of jobs lost were in the north of England figure. I shall explain it at length afterwards. I know how he did it. It was a clever analysis of a document that he got three days ahead of publication. In fact, manufacturing jobs have been lost in the manufacturing areas, but 28 per cent. of the manufacturing jobs lost have been in the south of England. According to the Labour party's definition, 40 per cent. have been lost. But that loss of jobs is not the problem that we are facing. We should be facing the situation of rising total employment. If there is a problem, it is that the additional jobs are increasing more rapidly in parts of the south than in parts of the north. But that is not the analysis put forward by the Opposition.

Over the past three years, a net growth in jobs has been taking place in each region in England—3 per cent. in the northern region, 1 per cent. in the north-west and 4 per cent. in Yorkshire and Humberside. Unemployment is falling steadily—that is the Opposition's problem. Over the past year, the fastest fall in unemployment has been in Wales, the north, the north-west and the west midlands. Youth unemployment is falling everywhere and is falling faster in the northern regions. Since 1983, 6 per cent. more jobs have been created in the south-east and in the south-west. In East Anglia there has been a 13 per cent. net additional growth in jobs. Now that we have growth, better economic performance and competitive industry, the growth in output and employment is occurring faster in some parts of the country than in others.

Like my right hon Friend the Chancellor and some of my hon. Friends who have spoken in the debate, I am a northern Member. We must tackle the problem. Our approach when we see that the recovery and the growth of new jobs is occurring faster in the south than in the north is to address ourselves to the problems of making the north as attractive a place for new investment and new business as the south and of ensuring that it widens its economic base and attracts those types of industry that give rise to growth in the south.

We are looking forward to a new northern economy. We are bringing in new ideas to stimulate growth. We are encouraging enterprise and entrepreneurship there. Nevertheless, the Labour party takes a different view. it looks back to the heavy traditional industrial base of the north, talks about the old policies that it followed and tends in its pronouncements, especially simplified ones, to feed southern prejudices and images of the north which it has created with cloth-cap poverty and deprivation—the picture that Labour Members like to paint.

Labour Members have not addressed themselves throughout the debate to all the policies that are beginning to attract new industries to the north—what we are doing to put money in to clear up the derelict land; the urban development corporations which we have have set up on Tyneside and Teesside and at Trafford Park to speed up development; the enterprise zones, which we have set up in the middle of the industrial cities there; the enterprise agency network, which we have set up across the country; and the work of the city action teams and inner city teams in Leeds and Middlesbrough, which are bringing new training and new employment opportunities to people in those places.

Labour Members have not addressed themselves to the way in which we are developing a public-private sector partnership, working beside groups such as Business in the Community and putting money into the Prince of Wales' youth business trust to get young people trained for a more modern economy. It is by giving people in the north more training, not just in skills, but in entrepreneurship, and by making the area more attractive to new investment that we have enabled people to take advantage of the lower costs in the north and build on that growth in new jobs, which, I repeat, is already taking place there.

Unemployment is falling faster in the north, than in the south. It will be helped by better industrial relations in the north, by the fact that Nissan is attracted to Washington new town and by the ability to have a single union deal with the union that will promote flexible working practices—the type of things that the TUC and half the Labour movement spend their time resisting. Even when we look at regional pay differentials, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks did, horror is aroused in the minds of most Opposition Members.

The Opposition emphasise a totally different approach to regional policy, one based on arguments about grants. It is about time that we acted as we have to make the grants more selective, to stop the waste that occurred under the old system and to concentrate grants, as we do, more on jobs and specific areas and to target them better. Just to defend regional policy in its traditional form, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) sought to do, is to ignore the failures of regional policy in the 1970s.

There are those who say that the west midlands is now an example of the north-south divide. It is no good going back to the west midlands and saying that the regional policies of the 1970s, which barred new development in that region, did not contribute to its problems. It narrowed its economic base and that economy collapsed when the vehicle industry failed. It was a victim and not a beneficiary of the Labour party's regional policy. That is the opinion in the region.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): What do you know about it?

Mr. Clarke: I know the midlands better than the hon. Gentleman.

We have also been treated to a little bit of City bashing. That was rather forlorn, because I was delighted to hear, as were, I am sure, many Members, that the Pilkington bid is now a dead issue.—*[Interruption.]* It is thanks to the

fact that Pilkington was able to produce good profit forecasts. The bid has collapsed and the market has resolved the problem. We did not have the delay of a reference. It is no good Labour Members claiming that it was their lobbying that produced that result. That matter was satisfactorily resolved by the market.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup and other hon. Friends have said that we should examine the rules in the light of the Pilkington reference. They believe that we have narrowed the rules too much by concentrating on competition. We have not changed the rules and it is still possible for Ministers to take a wider view of the public interest. I invite Members to consider the reference of the Gulf Resources' bid for IC Gas. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Clarke: It is simply not true that it is right to move in, ad hoc, in response to political pressures and make up the rules—as some hon. Members seem to imply—one by one as we go along. It is not right to apply political judgment to the way in which one makes efficient use of assets. That is the danger of the approach that is suddenly advocated by the Labour party. It has given up any attempt to woo those in the City and has opted for crude City bashing to arouse prejudice against the City across the country.

The idea that Labour Ministers will take a closer political role in making such decisions does not fill me with joy in regard to employment or any other matter. If Labour Members were in a position to take decisions on mergers, such decisions would be taken in response to lobbies from within unions, interest groups inside the Labour party and with an eye on marginal seats. Any assertion that jobs and companies in the north would be safe in the hands of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and his right hon. Friends should send a shiver down the spines of those not only in board rooms but in the workplace of most companies likely to be affected. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Clarke: I was asked about controls within the City. The fact is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) have introduced a great legislative change that has greatly strengthened the powers of the inspectors and greatly improved the policing of the City.

Some have asserted that one can already demonstrate that self-control and self-regulation have failed. It is far too premature to do so considering that self-regulation has rapidly applied itself to the current problems in the City. That is thanks to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Minister.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup asked how fast the new machinery can work and he questioned whether there is a risk that prosecutions will be delayed as the case goes from the inspectors to the Director of Public Prosecutions. I remind hon. Members that allegations of insider dealing at Morgan Grenfell were immediately referred by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and one member of that institution, Mr. Collier, has been charged as a result of the actions taken.

I have specified our position on employment, the economy and the City. Throughout the debate we have heard nothing from the Labour party about its proposals. We have had distortion of the figures in an attempt to try to construct a crude north-south divide. The vision that the Labour party offers the north is absolutely depressing. When it first tried to raise this issue, it organised a Jarrow march — not like the one that the Labour movement boycotted in the 1930s. This one was financed with all the media hype that the Labour party could manage — the brass bands, the trade union banners, the look back to the old image of the north that it was trying to revive. There is genuine unemployment in the north, which we are tackling. All the brass bands, all the banners and all the rubbish that we have heard in this debate from the Opposition offer no hope to the north.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 355.

Division No. 61] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Monty'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil

Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Don Dixon.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bitten, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombe, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fineberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Sir Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Sir Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hartford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the success of its economic policies which have led to six years of healthy, balanced economic growth, have brought inflation down to its lowest levels for nearly two decades, have enabled industry to become more profitable than at any time since 1964, have brought the fastest productivity growth among major European countries since 1979 and have fostered the conditions in which a million new jobs have been created throughout the country since 1983.

Broadcasting

10.15 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8227/84 on the establishment of the common market for broadcasting, and 6739/86 on the co-ordination of certain provisions in Member States concerning the pursuit of broadcasting activities; and supports the Government's view that the proposed Council of Europe Convention on broadcasting provides the most appropriate means of ensuring the flow of television programmes across frontiers in Europe.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann). I am prepared to allow a joint debate on the motion and on the amendment.

Mr. Mellor: I am pleased that today we have the opportunity to discuss this important Community initiative on the regulation of transfrontier broadcasting. I shall be brief in my introductory remarks since the Government's view on these issues is well known and the purpose of this short debate is to elicit the views of the House.

The Commission produced its Green Paper on broadcasting in June 1984, partly in response to earlier resolutions on international broadcasting that had been passed in the European Parliament. The Green Paper before us is a weighty document running to some 367 pages. It attempts at very great length to argue a case for Community competence in broadcasting matters and more specifically proposes a limited harmonisation of member states' law on broadcast advertising, on programmes that might be seen by children, and on copyright. There followed a lengthy period of discussion of the document in which the Commission proposals received a generally critical reaction. Certainly in this country the broadcasters, most of the advertisers, and the copyright interests were united in their opposition. Many other countries in Europe were highly sceptical.

In May last year the Commission brought forward the fruits of the debate on the Green Paper in the form of the draft directive which is also before us. Some adjustments had been made in response to the earlier criticisms. The Commission has dropped its proposals on the right of reply and limits those on the protection of children to one very small section. The advertising section has been improved and now falls more closely in line with the sort of formulations we are used to in our IBA code.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I apologise to the Minister for interrupting him so early in his speech, but my intervention may have some beneficial side effects. Is he aware that the Select Committee on European Legislation recommended in its fourth report of 12 December 1984 that this matter was so important that it called for an early debate? Does he accept that the Government have been a bit tardy in providing time for us to debate it? If we had had time to debate it, there could have been some input before the directive was drawn up.

Mr. Mellor: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that in no sense do we want to exclude the House from these considerations. We took a highly sceptical view about this in line with the sentiments in the House. We pressed the matter and as a result it is now before us in a considerably modified form, although I suspect that it will still be subject to scepticism in the House. I do not need to be inspired because I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton—is it North or South?

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): North.

Mr. Mellor: I knew that I had a 50 per cent. chance of being right. My hon. Friend leans ominously forward, but I can assure him that this is one of those rare occasions on European matters when the Government Front Bench will, I suspect, be wholly ad idem with the amount of scepticism that he wants to bring to bear. We thought that this was the appropriate time to deal with the matter, and I can assure hon. Members that we want the House to make known its view.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I am interested in what my hon. Friend says. Can he say how it gells with the proposed Council of Europe convention on broadcasting and television in which he played such an important and prominent part in Vienna just a couple of months ago?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I know the assiduousness with which he pursues his interests in the Council of Europe. The welcome agreement to which I shall come later in my speech and which was reached around a table in the Council of Europe obviates the need for Community action in almost all of the matters dilated upon in this extensive document.

I very much welcome the consensus around the table in Vienna that the more appropriate way to deal with these matters is with the lighter hand of regulation of a Council of Europe convention rather than that of a commission which—perhaps not winning myself too many friends in Brussels—was bringing to bear on sensitive issues like broadcasting the same skills used in the manufacture of pork sausages. The copyright proposals had undergone a slight change with the introduction of a delaying mechanism for triggering the operation of the statutory licence, but otherwise the basic principles of the Green Paper remained unchanged. In addition to these changes, however, the Commission had introduced a wholly new proposal for quotas on Community programming and on works by independent producers.

The broad object of these proposals is to harmonise member states' laws to overcome any current obstacles to transfrontier broadcasting. We, of course, wholeheartedly support the principle of free movement of radio and television programmes across frontiers. We place no obstacles in the way either of the reception in the United Kingdom or services from abroad or the transmission from the United Kingdom of services to other countries. We have practical evidence of the successful operation of that policy in the foreign television services that can now be viewed on our cable systems and in the growth of United Kingdom programme providers, such as Superchannel which starts its new service at the end of this month, and Sky-channel, which has been going for some considerable time.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman thinks that his former employers, by whom he might with advantage continue to be employed, perhaps should have a plug from time to time, and I am sure if I do not give him a plug he will manage it himself. While we believe that some system is

needed to regulate frontier broadcasting, we do not believe that a case has been made out for the Community to provide that system in terms of draft legislation of this kind.

Mr. Marlow: Is it my hon. Friend's view, and the view of the Government, that the Community should have competence in this issue?

Mr. Mellor: No. I think it is our view that the Community's competence in this issue is extremely limited and should remain so.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Does that mean that my hon. Friend rejects that competence under article 155 of the treaty?

Mr. Mellor: What my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has begun, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Morris) is bound to follow. The fact of the matter is that Community competence exists—I shall mention later, if at some point permitted, matters that pertain to economic and industrial aspects—but it does not relate to the broader aspects of cultural and other matters in broadcasting, which are more properly left, we believe, to other hands to regulate. It is certainly our case that transfrontier broadcasting requires some regulation of a kind akin to that in our own broadcasting Act. As I said in answer to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), it is our firm belief that that is better provided through a Council of Europe convention which applies a somewhat lighter and even more sensitive hand to these difficult issues.

Having, I hope, satisfied all the representatives of the town of Northampton, I turn to Crewe and Nantwich.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Surely the point is that the hon. Gentleman now has no power of veto. If that is so, may we take it that, if the rest of the European Ministers decide that they are willing to go along with the content of the existing letter, people will be forced to acquiesce?

Mr. Mellor: That brings us to a very important question: using the words so beloved of Foreign Office advisers, are we to isolate this issue? I am happy to say that we are not isolated on this issue. Indeed, the very comforting fact that emerged from the Council of Europe meeting last month in Vienna was the considerable scepticism expressed all round the table that the EC directive was not the appropriate way of dealing with the matter. I still remember clearly the speech of Herr Zimmerman, the Interior Minister for West Germany, on that point. Indeed, a commitment that we introduced into the conclusions of that meeting, calling for urgent action to be taken on a Council of Europe convention, was supported unanimously by all countries present in clear recognition that the consequence, as widely commented on in the broadcasting press, was to place much less emphasis on the EC draft. I believe that everyone around the table in Vienna, including all the members of the EC who were represented, took that decision in the clear knowledge of its implications.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): If my hon. Friend thinks that it is not appropriate to deal with the matter by means of the draft directive, would it not make sense for us to vote against it?

Mr. Mellor: It has not come to that, but I assure my hon. Friend that we should not shrink from that. [*Hon. Members:* "Tonight."] I should have thought that the best thing was to let matters take their course. I hope that I am making clear to the House that we are doing battle, I believe successfully, for the principle which my hon. Friend holds, that is, that the directive in its present form is not acceptable. That is very much the view of the Government. I assure my hon. Friend that we need no further encouragement in arguing that case.

Mr. Marlow: I am trying to help my hon. Friend, as always. In view of what he has said thus far, would it not be helpful to him if the House expressed its view according to the amendment that has been put down by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann)? Would not that be power to my hon. Friend's elbow?

Mr. Mellor: I am also, believe it or not, trying to be helpful to my hon. Friend. I think that he is so inured to unhelpful answers from the Dispatch Box on European matters that he cannot recognise a helpful answer when he gets one. I am greatly encouraged by the interest in the debate; I am even shocked as one who is much more accustomed to addressing an empty Chamber at this time of night. I am glad that my reputation has not emptied the Chamber, as it usually does.

I am sure that the placing on the record in this debate of firm views supportive of the Government's strong line against this is the appropriate step. It would be unfortunate if the impression were given that there were differences between us on the issue when there are not. If my hon. Friend were to use those powers of analysis for which he is so famed, I should have thought that he would have seen that there was barely room to slip someone as sylphlike as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) between my hon. Friend's position and mine.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle) *rose*—

Mr. Mellor: At some point I shall have to get on with the rest of my speech, which has been very kindly prepared for me.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps my hon. Friend will take the opportunity to inform the House what objection he has to the amendment.

Mr. Mellor: We would prefer the House to take cognisance of the Government's position which is in line with the sceptical view of the House on the matter. That would be a better way of proceeding than, as it were, trying to rub the matter in further when there is no need for that. If matters were to proceed beyond that, and if it appeared that our position was less popular than we believe it to be within the wider Community, there would be ample opportunity for the House to give its opinion further. I do not know why my hon. Friend feels the need to impress a case that is already accepted by the Government.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: Yes, if the hon. Gentleman promises not to be a pest for the rest of the evening. I am sure that that is a promise he would not lightly undertake, given it is one he would find impossible to keep.

Mr. Mitchell: I note the Minister's expression of confidence. My question is simply whether we have a treaty veto on this matter or whether a decision can be taken by qualified majority decision.

Mr. Mellor: It may be able to be taken in that way.

Mr. Mitchell: In what way?

Mr. Mellor: By a qualified majority. I pointed out in answer to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that we have no reason to feel that our case is not compelling in the eyes of other than ourselves. We must not start from the basis of believing that we are alone in this matter. We are not. If the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) had been present in Vienna —that is not an invitation for him to be so on future occasions—he would have found no lack of enthusiasm for the case that we were putting.

Indeed, we proposed an amendment to toughen up the terms of the Council of Europe conference decision to ensure that that opinion, which was much more in favour of a Council of Europe convention than a draft EC directive had the opportunity of focusing sharply on the need for such a convention, and that is what happened. That was done unanimously by the 20 countries represented around the table.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) will agree that I have made it clear beyond doubt that I have every sympathy with the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann). Like those who support it, we are opposed to the imposition from Brussels of quotas on European programmes and we do not believe that the treaty base proposed by the Commission is relevant to the proposals that it has made. The Council itself will finally decide the appropriate treaty base, and I believe that there is a general recognition among most member states that controversial proposals of this kind merit unanimous decisions.

I made it clear to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that even if one envisaged the alternative, which would be a majority view, I do not believe we are in a minority on this issue. But even assuming that, we have every reason to be confident. We shall certainly seek a treaty base on this matter which requires unanimity. That is a key part of our negotiating position. I hope that, with that firm assurance, my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton will support the motion and will not feel compelled to press the amendment. There cannot have been many occasions when a Minister has expressed as much scepticism about an EC document as I am doing tonight.

Having laboured that mightily in the vineyard, it would be scant reward for such pains if my right hon. Friend, who may occasionally show more perspicacity than my helpful hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North or my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle — helpfulness is not confined to Northampton, as I have discovered—did not consider it appropriate, having registered the point, not to press it.

I will explore a little further the reasons why we are sceptical of what the EC is saying. We believe, as I made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North, that some system is needed to regulate transfrontier broadcasting, but we do not believe that a case has been made out for the Community to provide that system in terms of draft legislation of this kind. There is, to begin with, the question of Community competence on specific areas, such as the protection of children; we have serious doubts whether the Community can claim competence. That has nothing to do with our believing that children require protection. The question is whether the man in Brussels should be the knight in shining armour to purport to do that. Even on the general issue, we believe that the matter will need to be discussed in Brussels in more detail than it has been discussed so far.

The Commission, naturally enough, approaches these issues from the point of view of a Community which is concerned primarily with economic regulation. Industrial issues are paramount in some areas of broadcasting, and community involvement is therefore, appropriate. I hope that a good broadcasting example is the recently adopted directive on transmission standards for direct broadcasting by satellite.

However, broadcasting services in general serve cultural, social and political goals as much as economic ones. We have evidence of that in the presence on the Opposition Front bench of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) who is, at least in the opinion of the Leader of the Opposition, cultural values personified. However, it remains to be seen whether that illusion will be more widely shared once the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to settle in to his responsibilities.

In the Government's view, the concentration in both the Green Paper and the draft directive on economic objectives presented in a narrow legalistic way fails to give proper weight to the wider cultural considerations. We fear that the draft directive in its current form will put national systems of broadcasting in a straightjacket which will ultimately create more obstacles to the free flow of television programmes than it eliminates.

Therefore, our views on the specific proposals in the draft directive can be given in a very few words. We have serious reservations about the Commission's approach on copyright and we shall continue to press for the maintenance of the existing system of voluntary agreements freely negoiated, rather than a system which depends ultimately upon the imposition of a statutory licence. We do not believe that the proposals on programming quotas are relevant to the free flow of television programmes across frontiers, and in that respect they seem to be in the wrong directive, to put it at its kindest.

While we recognise that there should be a special place for European programmes and for independent production in our television schedules, we see those as essentially domestic questions for each country to decide according to the prevailing circumstances within its borders. There is certainly no case for fixed quotas imposed on everyone from Brussels. The section on the protection of children, while, as I have already said, being thoroughly praiseworthy in its general motivation, raises important questions of competence which I have already mentioned and which we are not prepared to lay on one side.

The proposals on advertising and sponsorship come closer to the system we operate in this country, but they are still too restrictive in their outlook — for example, the over-complicated article on sponsorhip. In many respects, they are far more detailed than is necessary in a framework directive of this kind. As I have said, we are back in the saus.gemeat regime that I have already regretted.

Some system of common regulation is needed between states to underpin the free flow of television programmes across frontiers, but this need be little more than the establishment of general principles in relation to such matters as programe standards and advertisements that we take for granted in our domestic broadcasting set-up. It is important that any transfrontier regulation in this area is sufficiently flexible to meet the domestic needs of individual countries, and does not contain too fine a level of detail which may lead to more restriction rather than less. We believe that the Council of Europe is the most appropriate forum for regulating these matters, because its traditional approach on cultural matters is more flexible than that shown in this draft directive, and because it provides a much larger grouping of European states than is represented by the Community. Above all, it is important that we do not split Europe on these matters between EC and non-EC countries, all of which traditionally broadcast to one another.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington reminded the House—I thank him for his kind words—that is why, when I attended in Vienna last month the first conference that has been held of European broadcasting Ministers, I strongly supported the firm declaration, to which all the Ministers subscribed, that the Council of Europe is the most suitable institution in Europe for the eleboration and further development of a framework for transfrontier broadcasting.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): I agree with the Minister that the Council of Europe has moved forward. The problem is that the Common Market would not allow sufficient flexibility, but would impose a straitjacket. However, that is not the problem. Professor Peacock has said that satellite broadcasting cannot be controlled by regulation, so we should proceed to a free market. In other words, not even the Council of Europe can control or regulate in that sense. How is the Minister applying his mind to that crucial cultural question?

Mr. Mellor: I am coming to my account of Vienna. If we were to establish a Council of Europe convention which reproduced in European commonly agreed law through a convention the arrangements that we have in our domestic broadcasting legislation, that would provide a control over satellite operators. In effect, they would not be operating from outside that regime, particularly if, as we would hope, that convention would be open for signature to non-EC countries, such as the United States, as it could be and, I hope, would be.

Mr. Buchan: The trouble is that, if we were to apply all the regulatory methods of all countries involved, no television would be broadcast. Is not the problem, for example, Murdoch and Maxwell buying into satellites going up from France or Luxembourg under the control of the regulations of the transmitting country? Is not that a problem with which an overall convention could not cope?

Mr. Mellor: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, whose interest in this matter I respect, I do not take such a pessimistic view. I certainly take the view, which was widely held around the table in Vienna, that it is no good regretting the problems that satellite broadcasting will pose. We must not be Canute-like. Satellite broadcasting will come about. The question is, under what sort of regime? We must believe—I believe this and I hope that I am not being over-optimistic—that a regime can be established by agreement between civilised states which will regulate satellite broadcasting. I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman and glad to have an opportunity to deal with a crucial forward planning point with which any British Government must deal in relation to inevitable developments. The question is how that inevitable development takes place.

To return to what happened in Vienna, the council of Europe is experienced in this area and has already adopted over the past few years several recommendations which provide an appropritate measure of transfrontier regulation. I am grateful to all colleagues on both sides of the Chamber who spend a great deal of time in the Council of Europe for having broken so much ground and for establishing a common understanding of these difficulties which has made the task of Ministers easier because they can point to a large body of agreed principles which exist as a result of those efforts. I strongly commend them.

The only matter lacking in the recommendations is binding legal force. That is why I tabled in Vienna a proposal which was adopted unanimously by the conference—that the Council of Europe should proceed rapidly to draw up a binding convention on the most crucial aspects of transfrontier broadcasting for which the existing instrument provides a useful base.

The work of drafting the convention has already begun at official level. It is significant that the conference took place in December. The need for urgency was met by the arrangement that written submissions for the basis of the convention should be submitted by February—in other words, within two months—and officials should meet in March to try to break the ground. I hope that by the summer we shall be well advanced. As Mr. Ray Snoddy, the distinguished commentator on these matters, made clear in a recent article in "Media Week", if the EC Commission did not recognise what a coach and horses that was driving through its ambitions in this area, it was indeed blind to the significance of the decision taken in Vienna. I am not blind to the significance of that, and I hope that the House will not be either.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): Will my hon. Friend say whether the convention deals with the question or principle of quotas which seems to have been rejected?

Mr. Mellor: We have not yet reached that point. No one has any objection to the idea that there should be considerable European input into what will be a European service. None of us wants to be part of some sort of cultural colonialism from across the Atlantic or elsewhere. But we cannot agree to quotas being established directly by officials, for example, in the Commission who believe that this is just an extension of the regulations on the contents of some agricultural product. Matters are more complex than that. That is what we mean by the idea of the lighter hand. None of us wants to resist the development of European co-operation to protect the European heritage by ensuring that there is a large amount of European programming available on every broadcasting medium.

I should be happy to send my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) a full text of the conclusions of the Vienna conference in which that form of principle was written very large.

Mr. Corbett: All 500 pages.

Mr. Mellor: Not quite as long as that. We did not have the resources of the Commission to produce a document that would be an effective doorstop in many hon. Members' homes for many years to come.

If the member states of the Council of Europe can reach agreement on the content of such a convention — and the record is good in that area; we need think only of the fundamental and important conventions such as that on human rights that have become central parts of thinking in all member countries — I am confident that the Council will be able to meet all the objectives of the draft directive in securing the free flow of television programmes across frontiers without any unnecessary restrictions that a directive, if adopted, might bring in its wake.

For that reason, the motion states the Government's view that a Council of Europe convention is the right way forward. I hope that my remarks have ensured that my right hon. Friend and his associates will accept that I need no more matches applied to fire my belly on the issue and nor do my colleagues.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend knows the details well and he will know that section 17 of the explanatory memorandum to the draft directive states:

"For its part, the European Council approves the report's proposals"—

I believe that that refers to the "A People's Europe" report proposal—

"mentioning expressly those on culture including television, and instructed the Commission and the Member States 'to take the necessary implementing measures' ".

To what did the Council agree? If the Council has agreed, has not the pass been sold already?

Mr. Mellor: No. "A People's Europe" was a broad statement of principle which is now being used in evidence against us by a Commission bent on establishing competence in that area. That is part of the argumentation put forward, but we are not falling for it. I suggest that my hon. Friend follows that good example and does not fall for it himself. However, that in no way undermines our conviction that I have stated so often. I do not think that I make my point any stronger by repetition.

I hope that my comments tonight will bind all of us together in the conviction that this is not the proper way forward, that an alternative and better way has been established and that the Government are working towards that with all vigour. I hope to have the support of Members on both sides of the House tonight for the Government's actions on this issue.

10.47 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I am certain that it will be understood in Brussels that the invitation that we have tonight from the Government to take note of the Community documents is a mark of understated British disdain and not of welcome. The Minister's comments underline that point. The Minister's right hon. and hon. Friends must be perplexed and astonished at the fact that the Government will not accept the amendments, although I do not want to make heavy weather of that.

We must be clear about what we are asked to take note of tonight. The Commission is seeking to achieve, via our television screens, what politicians within the Community have not achieved and what the people of the 12 member states have never been consulted about — Europeanisation. That is a horrible word. The intention seems to be that at the flick of a switch, through a system that interferes grossly with our editorial freedom, harmonisation will come about. Those parts of Europe included in the Common Market are rich and varied in their national cultural backgrounds. Television without frontiers should not mean television without national flavour. Programmes should properly respect and reflect the different and diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of the nations within the Community. I believe that diversity, shared and different, is a strength not a weakness. The noble Lord speaking for the Home Office in the other place said:

"what most broadcasters in this country fear — and the Government agree with them—is that the Green Paper will be the first step on a road towards centralisation of control over broadcasting which will culminate in each country's broadcasting legislation and programming policies being made from a central point in Brussels rather than in each member state."

He went on to say that the issue was

"whether we want our broadcasting arrangements and our broadcasting legislation in the longer term to be made in Brussels rather than in London."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 March 1986; Vol. 472, c. 71, 72.]

The Independent Broadcasting Authority put the point another way when it said:

"European co-operation in broadcasting matters, as in other cultural matters, is not bounded by the limits of the Community."

The International Federation of Journalists, which links journalists and broadcasters in the non-Communist world, said at its conference in Elsinore that the Commission wants to

"regulate and influence the cultural wealth of member states".

It added that it is

"stripping away national boundaries and imposing a cordon of the Community's own boundaries."

The real merit of the objection of the International Federation of Journalists came when it said:

"this cordon can be breached by outside multinational interests with no time or interest in national cultural heritages."

In essence, the documents propose that we volunteer to an invasion of Euro-soaps, what Jeremy Isaacs, the chief executive of Channel 4, has described as "Euro-puddings". First came the wine lakes followed quickly by the beef and butter mountains, then ideas about Euro-water, Euro-bread and Euro-beaches. We are now offered the prospect of documentary mountains and soap opera lakes simply to meet some daft and rigid quota system. There is even the prospect of the French giving up the hijacking of British lorries carrying sheep and waylaying instead those stuffed with the tapes of Eastenders or Crossroads. That is what is meant by the proposal of one-third of screen time for each channel for made in EEC programmes, rising to two thirds after three years. It has nothing to do with quality or merit but simply to do with width. Show any old rubbish as long as it is made in the EEC.

The BBC and the IBA and, to be fair, the Minister, have objected to the proposals. I share the BBC and IBA's objections on the grounds of editorial freedom. The BBC says—we should listen to it:

"For as long as the BBC has existed the allocation of its resources have been determined according to its own priorities. Governments of all complexions have recognised that any interference would amount to editorial interference."

The Commission proposals would mean a degree of control over what is broadcast that goes well beyond

anything attempted or imposed by any Government. That point was made by Sir Curtis Keeble, a BBC governor, on 15 January.

Mr. Ottaway: Rubbish.

Mr. Corbett: The hon. Gentleman may say rubbish. The Green Paper never even raised the question of quotas. When the broadcasting authorities and others were invited to comment that was not even on the horizon. It is the same with the idea of 5 per cent. of television budgets having to be spent with independent producers, rising to 10 per cent. after three years. That interferes with editorial freedom. That apart, there is no guarantee—perhaps no chance — that it would create any new employment outside of the existing broadcasting organisations. It will not automatically enhance the quality of broadcasting. Who are the independent producers likely to be? They will be the Murdochs, owners of vast media empires who have demonstrated their determination to milk the international airwaves for private gain. It will be an up-dated version of the late Lord Thomson's licence to print money.

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is being a little unfair by quoting Murdoch as the only potential independent producer when there are many others in this country and the rest of Europe?

Mr. Corbett: The hon. Gentleman has made a fair point, but I have a particular loathing for that media proprietor. That is my bias.

We then come to the important matter of copyright. I welcome what the Minister had to say about the Government's serious reservations on the proposals of the Commission. I remind the Minister that, when this matter was debated in another place, Lord Glenarthur said:

"The . . . purpose of . . . the . . . copyright proposals" —

he appeared to defend them; I shall be glad if the Government have changed their position—

"is to ensure that copyright should not be used as a means to prevent the retransmission in one member state, normally by cable, of a broadcast made from another member state." [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 March 1986; Vol. 472, c.70.]

In other words, it was said that copyright can be breached and ignored until after a programme has been broadcast, and then the copyright owner will have to try to negotiate a fee. If that fee were not agreeable, he will then have to go to arbitration. This measure is no more or less than sheer robbery. It must be the right of every copyright holder to protect his or her own intellectual property. The International Federation of Journalists put it this way:

"The proposal—

that is the one concerning copyright—

"is nothing short of blackmail. It holds a pistol to the head of a copyright holder and prevents him or her from truly free negotiations or fair terms and conditions."

That view is backed by the BBC the IBA, and the European TUC, and it has been criticised by the European Broadcasting Union. The Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians makes the point that

"compulsory licensing after 2 years would mean that rights holders would ultimately lose any control or ability to veto the further use of their work".

It adds:

"the 2-year negotiating period would of course be totally prejudiced by the certain knowledge that compulsory licensing would apply at the end of the period. The negotiating position of the copyright holder would be rendered extremely weak."

Nobody can argue with that view. The British Copyright Council has said that no evidence has been produced by the Commission to show that the present copyright rules have impeded the distribution of programmes by cable. Those rules enable the holders freely to negotiate for a fair return and to take such advantages as they can from competing applications for the use of programmes.

Any arbitration system, however it sets off, is bound, in my view, to take the "going rate" view on the basis of the lowest common denominator. At the end of the day, it must be right that the copyright holder should retain the right to say, "No, thank you," otherwise it is akin to theft. The British Copyright Council proposes an agency akin to the Performing Right Society as a possible alternative, although I much prefer to allow the copyright holder freely to negotiate the contract.

I agree that the Council of Europe route is the more promising, especially because a wider Europe is involved, and also because, through that body, thoughts, on which the documents are based, of "completing the internal market" and treating broadcasting as an economic activity akin to the making of cans of peas or motorcars can properly be left on one side.

Television without frontiers is happening. We should welcome the breaking down of barriers right across the whole of Europe. Although, as we are the heaviest television watchers among 15 European nations, I wonder where people are expected to get the extra time to watch the additional channels. We must also understand that the choice of more programmes does not necessarily mean more choice. It can simply mean more of the same—more chat shows and more inane game shows. We should seek to protect quality. If anyone has any doubts about that matter, he should spend a night in a hotel room, watching the seven channels and the constant output of pap and porn. We need regulations — minimum regulations, in my view—on cross-frontier broadcasting. We need to protect against offences to taste and the rest of it as well as properly to control advertising. We need also to try to expand access to this media to those who are denied it.

The latest satellite venture starts on 2 February, when, via cable, ITN will start to broadcast news bulletins in English to six million people in 14 countries. That should give the Minister's right hon. Friend an even bigger monitoring job to do. Others will follow. A new world of information, entertainment and culture opens up to us. An extremely important point was made by the BBC:

"The way to ensure the broadcasting culture of Europe is to ensure that there are strong national services able to compete for viewers with the cross-frontier services."

If the Council of Europe document can help to ensure that as part of its regulatory proposals, we shall give the proposals, a welcome which we feel amply justified in refusing to give these EEC documents.

11 pm

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): I beg to move, to leave out from "activities" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"fully supports the views of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Independent Broadcasting Authority as being wholly opposed to the introduction of quotas of programmes based on national origin, which would be an unprecedented interference with broadcasting freedom; and insists, notwithstanding the provisions of the Single European

[Sir Edward du Cann]

Act, that the issue should be determined within the European Economic Community by unanimity and not by majority vote.".

The purpose of the amendment is to endeavour to bring out more clearly the issues that a number of us regard as of substantial importance. There are two in particular. The first is maintenance of freedom of choice for British people and for people generally who live in the European Community and the second is enhancement of the principle of self-regulation, which I have learnt in other contexts is very much the in phrase today.

I should like to express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the realism that was plainly evidenced in his excellent speech. A strong note of common sense ran through it, which I am sure will be of great assistance to the House in coming to a conclusion. I have one important reservation, however, about his remarks to which I shall come later.

A fine note was set by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I hope that the debate will enable my hon. Friend the Minister to note clearly the mood of the House, which I believe is typical of the country's mood, so that, when he makes our view clear in the Community, he need be in no doubt that he has full backing for the views that he expressed this evening. I would go further and say that the House has an important duty in effect to give him an instruction.

Irrespective of one's views about the treaty of Rome, I believe that hon. Members, broadcasting authorities and the many independent commentators who have given their views on these subjects will always be right to view radical proposals for new controls and influences of any kind on broadcasting with extreme caution.

The point at issue in the debate is whether each country's broadcasting legislation and programming policies should come from one central location — Brussels—rather than each member state. It may well be right in the long term to aim for the harmonisation of advertising practices, and so on — standardisation in matters of manufacturing practice, as the hon. Member for Erdington might say. Perhaps we would agree on that. But central control of programme content is another matter entirely. I beg to disagree with that, as, I think, would all of us.

I shall consider these proposals seriatim. The House may applaud the proposals for the protection of children, to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred. We are all against sin in the House of Commons, more or less. The House may be indifferent to harsher controls on tobacco advertising or sponsorship, although I feel that the proposal goes a good deal further than is necessary or desirable.

I loathe the fussiness and nannying attitude of some of those who would rule our lives. I view with horror the prospect of restrictions on liquor advertising. One should be able to make-up one's mind about whether or not one smokes or drinks. I do not wish to be told by some official in Brussels what I may or may not do.

The House should strongly oppose the unwelcome provision on copyright. The hon. Member for Erdington referred to that in a telling passage. It is an absurd proposal and an insult to practical people in Britain. Programmes produced in Britain are a great export success and it would be folly, if not wickedness, to put that success in jeopardy.

The House must reject the obligation that broadcasting networks should be obliged to show 30 per cent. of European television, which would later rise to 60 per cent. This is the worst proposal of all and would be an absurd imposition. It would represent an unprecedented interference in the freedom of the BBC, the IBA and the networks to decide on programme content solely on the basis of quality. The Minister has admitted that that provision would bar us from wider exchanges; that was confirmed by the hon. Member for Erdington.

Mr. Ottaway: The proposal by the European Commission to introduce a quota is nothing more than an attempt to conserve the European culture and to keep out American soaps. It is not an attempt to impose a restriction on the operation of the BBC or the IBA.

Sir Edward du Cann: No, I do not accept that. I have great sympathy with the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) — unfortunately, he has a bad throat, or he would make the analogy himself. My hon. Friend said that he was reminded of the medieval monks who preferred to go on writing and copying, and rendering the new printing presses illegal. We are faced with precisely the same situation.

The idea that one can cherish a culture by legislation is absurd. If a culture has any strength it will speak for itself and live and thrive. To impose quotas on us and oblige us to watch second-class material is not acceptable.

Transfrontier broadcasting is an admirable objective. However, it should take place naturally and not under central direction. The Minister was absolutely right when he said that the case for Community legislation on the subject had not been made out.

Over the years, since the 2LO days, we have established adequate domestic controls and standards. We have introduced amended and improved practices that are generally acceptable to British people. Many countries envy our standards and our system of controls. It is wrong that any attempt should be made to jettison those controls overnight.

Freedom of expression, freedom of choice, quality, and the satisfaction of local tastes are fragile flowers. They should be nurtured, not sacrificed to some arrogant cause of standardisation. How do we protect ourselves? Here I come to the substance of my reservations about the Minister's speech.

The truth is that all this has become much more difficult since the passage into law of the Single European Act 1986. The House is aware that that Act provides:

"qualified majority voting will replace unanimity in the major areas concerned with the completion of the internal market, including policies on the right to provide services in another member state."

Those are not my words but those of the Home Secretary.

If that is the case, it is not good enough that this House should be asked merely to take note of the position. The House has a duty to disapprove of these documents. That is why I am afraid that I am unable to accept my hon. Friend's suggestion that we should meekly and tamely connive at the Government's motion. That is why I think that it would be right to maintain our position on the amendment.

Mr. Marlow: Would it be fair to say that the difference between my right hon. Friend and the Minister is that the Minister is saying, "We are suggesting, as a Government, a different proposal from that which is being suggested by the Community", whereas in his amendment my right hon. Friend is saying that by using the word "insists" it would be done by unanimity? If the issue were decided within the Community by majority voting but the House had decided that it must be done by unanimity, that would be a requirement on Her Majesty's Government to veto whatever had been decided by majority voting.

Sir Edward du Cann: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The truth is that we have been placed in an impossible position, following the passage into law of the Single European Act. The only way in which the motion on the Order Paper would be acceptable to many of us would be if we had an irrevocable undertaking from my hon. Friend tonight that under no circumstances would majority voting be allowed to rule. As I understand it, that is not what he said to us in his speech.

Mr. Mellor *rose——*

Sir Edward du Cann: If my hon. Friend wishes to intervene, that is fine.

Mr. Mellor: I am following with great care what my right hon. Friend is saying. I should be very sorry if, with all the agreement that there is, there should appear to be any dissension between us.

The point about the voting is that a directive has been proposed under article 57(2) and article 66. Article 57(2) provides for some degree of majority voting. However, other articles require unanimity—for example, articles 100 and 235. We think that those articles may be more appropriate for consideration of these matters. I cannot say categorically that there will not be majority voting, because I cannot say categorically what view — *[Interruption.]* May I deal with my right hon. Friend's point? It is late at night and it is difficult to make a coherent point with my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) sniping at me from a sedentary position.

The point I am putting to my right hon. Friend is that we shall argue with might and main that this is such a contentious matter that it should be dealt with only by way of unanimity. I cannot wholly guarantee that the Council of Europe will accept that view. However, if my right hon. Friend and others had been present, as were my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) and I, and seen the mood of those same countries and the Ministers who sit around the table at the Council of Europe in Vienna, they would have been left in no doubt that nobody wanted it, and that if the way to prevent it is to change the treaty base for it, as a way of voting it down with more enthusiasm, that should be done.

I hope that my intervention has helped my right hon. Friend. I should be sad if there had to be a Division. I hope that my right hon. Friend, with whom I agree in everthing that he said, will not feel that he needs to divide the House just on that basis.

Sir Edward du Cann: Obviously one wants to take extremely seriously what my hon. Friend has said. The trouble is that after a number of years in this House I have become increasingly convinced that good intentions by themselves are not enough. My hon. Friend speaks with great sincerity—I understand precisely what he is saying and I know that he will do his very best — but the difficulty is that he is not in a position to guarantee results. That is not his fault: we are all the prisoners of the situation in which we find ourselves. I assure my hon. Friend that I do not have the least wish to make any difficulty for him of any kind. All that I and my hon. Friends want to do is to reinforce his position, so that when he goes into the negotiating chamber he will feel that he has a very strong expression of opinion behind him, which I believe is typical not only of the House but also of the country.

Mr. Mellor: Of course I accept my right hon. Friend's sincerity and I understand the point that he is making. The difficulty over accepting his amendment is that it knocks out of the Government's motion the one positive point that is most likely to ensure that a clear majority of people, if not everybody around the table, reject the European Commission's ambitions. It knocks out the reference to the Council of Europe convention as being the proper way forward, and simply substitutes for that one objection of many to the draft directive — which may be a very objectionable one, but it is not the only objectionable feature of this—which is quotas and states that the issue should be determined by unanimity. That is something that I can assure my right hon. Friend we shall push for. But the mere fact that that was said — if the House accepted the amendment — would not necessarily strengthen our negotiating position one whit. We shall fight with all the resources at our disposal to ensure that the treaty base is one that requires unanimity.

I should hate the House to be forced to take the reference to the Council of Europe convention out of the motion, because that is the most appropriate, positive way of ensuring that we keep on side all those whom we need to keep on side on an issue where we all agree. Some regulation is needed, but the Council of Europe has the lighter hand.

Sir Edward du Cann: The more that my hon. Friend addresses the House the clearer his intentions become and the more we are reassured. My hon. Friends and I will consider carefully what he has said, and I renew my good wishes to him in his task.

What is clear is that we are all agreed about objectives, and that is satisfactory. How we achieve them is another matter. I regret that the passage of the Single European Act makes life more difficult than it might otherwise have been.

I hope that my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Government will be successful — in alliance with our partners, or some of them, in Europe — in persuading the Commission to draw back from the perilous course that is evidenced by the documents. I hope that he will be successful in working for evolution, not uniformity by some diktat. That is the ideal prescription for making more certain hostility and lack of co-operation to the European ideal. There are alternatives. My hon. Friend has mentioned one; multinational agreements on an ad hoc basis are another, and bilateral agreements between Governments and practical people are a third. There are many ways in which we can advance.

What the House must insist upon tonight is that the traditional independence of political control which Britain's broadcasters have always had must be

[Sir Edward du Cann]

maintained. That we shall never surrender, and I am glad that my hon. Friend and the Government, supported by the Opposition, are faithful to that point.

11.17 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I share the sentiment expressed by the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) in his last sentence, which reflects the views of all Members of the House.

It is better to take note of an EEC document than to be told what to do by Brussels. We would have opposed an EEC directive for a common market for broadcasting, rather as, with respect to the Minister, we continue to be opposed to the control of broadcasting by a Ministry of the Interior. I wonder what other countries control their broadcasting via the Department of the Interior or the Home Office.

Agreement and consensus are the only ways in which anything effective will be achieved. It is important that moves in this direction are made quickly, because technology will not wait for decisions to be made. We know to our cost what happens if we are dilatory about pursuing effective, modern technology. From 1987, 10 new channels will be broadcasting directly by satellite, which will be available to people with their own aerials. Cable and direct satellite broadcasting are inevitable, so there must be some regulatory regime for control. For that to be effective, we need the widest possible agreement, and hence the proposed Council of Europe convention, which includes 21 nations, seems an ideal forum for discussion.

Members in all parts of the House support the view that any agreement reached should be determined within the EEC by unanimity and not by a majority vote. That must be opposed. The difficulty of achieving a unanimous vote in the EEC is well known, and too often a good initiative is thwarted by one country pursuing its own interest to the detriment of all. Since the Government have not shown themselves to be very committed to the idea of consensus —I remember the Leader of the House saying:

"consensus, thank Heaven, will never reign here." — [*Official Report*, 18 July, 1985; Vol. 83, c. 480.]

— concern must be expressed as to the possibility of agreement being reached, particularly when it is Members of the Minister's party who support the demand for unanimity.

Some particular problems arise in trying to create a common market for broadcasting. Since the idea is to break down the barriers between countries, all of which have different laws relating to the air waves, there will have to be extensive discussions, especially in relation to copyright.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Freud: No, I shall not give way. I shall be as quick as I can be so that the hon. Lady may make her own speech.

A system of statutory licensing has been proposed under which cable operators in one member state would be able to retransmit the broadcasts made from another without prior consent from rights owners, providing that the retransmission was simultaneous and unaltered. Copyright owners would be entitled to equitable remuneration. That proposal runs contrary to present law under which all cable retransmission of broadcasts is prohibited unless agreed by the rights owners.

The intention to continue those arrangements was recently confirmed in the White Paper "Intellectual Property and Innovation". It appears that some compromise will have to be reached, but, more importantly, whatever is decided must be enforceable, which brings us back to the point that any decision made must be achieved by agreement rather than by directive.

The only way truly to protect the programme makers is to ensure that copyright regulations can be effectively enforced. The Association of Independent Radio Contractors considers that the present system of royalty payments represents a disadvantage for United Kingdom independent local radio and it welcomes the European harmonisation of national legislation which would enable a fairer balance to be struck between the interests of commercial broadcasters and copyright owners.

Consensus decisions will also be required with regard to advertising. Basically, the law of the United Kingdom at present conforms to what is being suggested in the EEC Green Paper "Television without frontiers". One notable exception is in relation to the advertising of tobacco products. The Independent Broadcasting Authority's code permits the advertising of cigar and pipe tobacco, whereas the paper provides a ban on all tobacco products.

The right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) said that he is against over-nannying. I realise that "nannying" is the popular term at the moment, but I cannot see any other way in which children of 10, 11 or 12 who are encouraged to watch television can be protected. If there is no regulation of commercials and the advertising of liquor and tobacco, infinite harm could be done and it is our duty to protect.

It is also suggested that member states should be obliged to admit advertising-based services from other countries so long as the amount of advertising does not exceed 15 per cent. of the time. That is just one of quotas which has been put forward. Quotas interfere with broadcasting freedom. It is for that reason that the BBC and the IBA oppose them and we on these Benches also believe in freedom of the air.

It cannot be denied that every country in the world has information and documents of which it does not want other countries to be aware, and because of the major opportunities for programme transmission across frontiers, which satellites and cable will bring, some time must be given to the consideration of a Bill of Rights aimed at freedom of information, or, perhaps more accurately, a limitation on concealments.

We have considered some of the issues which will arise when cable and satellites come to be used, but we should also consider which types of communication network is likely to be followed. For example, direct broadcasting by satellite has immediate attraction for broadcasting supported by advertising since there are so many potential viewers. However, cable television can cater for very limited audiences with highly specialised interests. The decision rests with the Government as to which direction cable television will take and how it will be financed. What is clear is that we need a forum of broadcasters and broadcasting companies to discuss the changes. However, the bottom line must not be forgotten—the people who

have a television set and will not pay for a dish, a cable, a subscription or even for a licence if it becomes legal not to have one. They, too, deserve consideration.

11.24 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Time is short and I shall be brief.

I start by declaring a double interest. I am connected with the advertising industry, but, far more importantly, I am one of Parliament's delegates to the council of Europe and, as my hon. Friend the Minister has been good enough to mention, I was fortunate enough to be there during the proceedings of the Council of Ministers in Vienna just over a month ago when these matters were thrashed out.

I do not seek to embarass the Minister, but I should say that he was one of the younger Ministers present and that he showed a maturity far in advance of his years. It was through his guidance, cajoling and persuading that the Ministers got together in a sensible way and presented us with a convention which is almost ready and which—I accept totally what the Minister says—will lead us along the right path to a solution of this difficult problem.

I am sure that at the end of the day we will be convinced that we are taking the right course in backing the Council of Europe convention and in rejecting the EEC directive about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) has spoken. My right hon. Friend exhibited his usual persuasion in saying that we should vote for the amendment, but an examination of the resolution shows that it would be far more sensible for the House to support the Minister's resolution which merely takes note in the usual way but specifically says that we should back the Council of Europe convention, knowing that we have serious reservations about the EEC propositions.

Like many other hon. Members, I went to the Vote Office yesterday and asked for the EEC papers on this subject. They are almost as long as Gibbon's "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". I do not say that the EEC is dishonest about these matters, because I think it is trying to be helpful. The explanatory memorandum talks about advertising, about protection of children and about the other issues. Therefore, the EEC is trying to present a system which will be helpful and useful to Europe, but the beginning of the preamble to one of these documents talks about

"the establishment of a common market in broadcasting".

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton knows, when we started out on the European course we were talking about a common market in industrial products and in materials and food and other things. We were not talking about a consensus on the regulation of broadcasting and television. There is a lot of good in this EEC directive, but, to use a colloquial expression, it is musclebound compared to the suggestions in the Council of Europe convention, and the Minister was right to say that it has a much lighter touch than the EEC proposal.

I accept what the Minister says, that there is no guarantee that he will be able to get a convincing unanimous vote on this and may have to be satisfied with a majority vote. Having heard and observed the Ministers from the other nations in the Council of Europe, I cannot believe that those hon. Members who are closely connected with the EEC will blithely discard the Council of Europe convention and agree with the EEC one.

We need some sort of system to protect the public from pornography and bad taste. We need proper advertising standards and the right limitation on the amount of advertising that is used. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton that we do not want any stupid provision to the effect that every country must have its quota of programmes. If we did that, there would be a great turn off all over the world. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, we may be going into an era of hundreds or even thousands of channels and if there is a sufficiency of the right kind of programmes people will not be taken in by inferior programmes.

We have, as a Parliament and a nation, to face the fact that television is exploding in a number of ways through satellite and cable. In America people can now pick up several hundred channels if they subscribe to cable television. Programmisation of the television media is totally different compared to two or three years ago, let alone 10 years ago. In the circumstances, we have to regulate it in the right way. We have to be prepared to tackle situations which will develop.

I cannot see the British Parliament not reacting when things go wrong. We will react violently, and properly so. In this situation, how much better it would be to have the kind of system which my hon. Friend the Minister has proposed tonight. We should now, through our various representatives, say to the EEC, "Up with this we will not put. Please go away and rely on the Council of Europe convention". If we do that, we shall be on the right track.

11.32 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly on this subject and to follow up the points made about the amendment.

One problem is the curious concept in the Common Market that all things can be reduced to being a service. For example, a resolution from the Committee of Culture in the Common Market said:

"We agree with the Commission and the Court of Justice that broadcasts of any type are also services within the meaning of the EEC treaty and freedom of movement of services therefore applies."

This curious application of economic industrial merchandising somehow equates to matters of culture and civilisation and expression in this way. It goes on:

"Viewers and listeners in the member states are entitled to receive all broadcasts from other member states that are technically and physically receivable without restrictions on the part of domestic authorities in the form in which they are transmitted in accordance with the law of the transmitting state."

Therefore, the regulation which we seek to apply to broadcasting receivers in this country from satellite cannot be controlled since the freedom is that of the transmitting state. If they are a bunch of rogues or hooligans, or whatever——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Or Murdoch.

Mr. Buchan: Or Murdoch. Whoever they are, there is no restriction as long as it is within the law of the transmitting state. This is the problem we are facing.

The second thing that exacerbates the situation is this curious pan-Europeanism they develop, as if somehow culture can be reduced to a pan-Europeanism, that a play can somehow express a pan-Europeanism. A play expresses a single factor of a situation, of two concrete

[Mr. Buchan]

people in a concrete situation in a concrete mentality. Indeed, the more localised it is, the more national it is, the more regional or personalised it is, the more international or European it becomes. Tolstoy's "War and Peace" appeals to us across the borders precisely because of its Russianism, not because of its pan-Europeanism. This is the kind of culture error which we are making which is bedevilling the situation.

This kind of unrestricted broadcasting does not become a question of freedom. The right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) was quite right when he said that culture cannot be preserved by a kind of diktat, but it certainly can be destroyed by a lack of enabling power which allows that culture to be expressed and to be seen. If there is no choice, there cannot be any preservation. If we have competing channels, all of undifferentiated pattern, transatlantic, no matter whether it be beamed up from Luxembourg or France by Maxwell or Murdoch, then of course local cultures will atrophy.

Those of us who have suffered an experimental period of watching this kind of broadcasting will know. I recommend that people watch the hours of the Sky Channel programmes on Murdoch's satellite, for example, and see what is offered—control by broadcasting. Or take American cable programming. If one watches American football, where every part is continuously interspersed with advertising, one will understand the nature of that which cannot be prevented if all is opened up in that form by the future of satellite control in this country.

We are afraid of two things. One is that this Thatcherite monetarist Government will accept the Peacock recommendation which says that one cannot in any case control new technologies, that there is no means of controlling satellites and that the whole thing should be opened up to the highest bidder, as it were, or to those who can afford it, allied to Peter Jay, who is arguing for do-it-yourself broadcasting. That would lead to a tiny monopoly of producers in broadcasting. That would happen on the one hand and on the other there would be inability to control the law of the transmitting country.

There has been a step forward in relation to the Council of Europe in line with a resolution that I managed to get through in Europe two or three months ago with the Federation of Socialist Parties. Those with whom I put forward the resolution were taking it to the Council of Europe and I am delighted at what happened. Otherwise, we would be open to the cultural monopoly that I have described.

The amendment is unfortunate in some ways. I would prefer the reference to the Council of Europe to remain in the motion. The crucial point is that we must defeat the enemy that is at our gates. Therefore, we must assert to Europe a view along the lines proposed by the right hon. Member for Taunton. We must insist on unanimity and say that we will not be dicated to by the operation of the Single European Act.

If we state that boldly tonight, there is nothing to prevent us from following up the alternative which still remains—to use the Council of Europe as far as we can rather than the Common Market. We will have asserted our position as regards the one and we can follow it up as regards the other.

I have two questions for my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). Does he think that regulatory powers matter? He said that the regulatory powers of the Council of Europe could achieve things. I should like him to answer yes or no to that question. Secondly, can he tell me whether in any other country, either in the Common Market or the Council of Europe, broadcasting is supervised and run by the Ministry of the Interior? I await his reply.

11.38 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): My hon. Friend the Minister is right to have reservations about the draft directive. Those reservations are well founded. We should be grateful to him for that and for the leadership which he gave to the conference in Vienna on the matter.

I underline what my hon. Friend said in his opening speech about many member states and industry bodies being against proposals for any form of directive governing broadcast advertising control. The generally accepted understanding is that those reservations remain, so it seems that there is no consensus in support of the directive. The conclusions of the member states were against a directive. The House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities also came out against such a directive. There seems to be a built-in body of opinion against the need for such a directive.

The major reason is that the Commission sustained its drive for harmonisation involving restrictions. If the Commission had instead stuck to its proclaimed objective of liberalisation and had gone for a directive without restrictions, those bodies of opinion might have reacted differently.

It may prove to be outside the competence of the Commission to take the direction that it has taken, because articles 59 and 62 of the treaty prohibit all restrictions on freedom to broadcast across the frontiers of member states. Even more fundamental, perhaps, is the binding obligation of article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights that the onus to prove the need for a directive must rest with the Commission. In that instance the Commission has to show that there is indeed a pressing social need for such a restriction. It is not enough for the Commission to have done what it has done and to have made so little advance in that direction.

At the end of the day the bare essentials of any directive or direction should be based on three broad principles: that the reception of broadcasts from other member states must be allowed; that the law and regulation of the originating member state must be observed; and that the material must not offend against good taste, morality, decency and religious and political beliefs. Those principles—and others could be added along the lines of the Council of Europe recommendations—represent the way in which we should be moving forward in this matter.

Radio, to which reference has been made, has been broadcast across frontiers for a long time. It does not seem to need any interference from this directive or indeed in any other direction.

Had time permitted, I would have made other points. Time is passing and I appreciate that other hon. Members wish to speak.

11.41 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Minister said that I would like this contentious measure

dealt with under Article 100. I have been long enough in this House and in the European Parliament to know that what individual Ministers and Members would like to see happen is not important. What matters is what is finally decided by the representative bodies concerned.

I have great faith in the Minister and I believe he is sincere when he tells us, in effect, "We accept your views, but we urge you not to press this amendment because we do not want it recorded that we were not prepared to accept the recommendation in relation to the Council of Europe."

Ministers leave their posts and even change their views. Governments can find themselves under enormous pressure when deals are stitched together between member states. Moves can come about which form part of a package concerning totally different aspects of legislation.

We are debating a typically Commission document. On the one hand, it is detailed and contains many facts relating to member states. On the other, it represents a collection of bizarre half-thought-out, partly prejudiced views which cannot be defended and which represent a series of non sequiturs. It is a pathetic attempt to deal with the important matter of satellite broadcasting, a subject which in due course will pose this House with some difficult political and moral questions. We have not yet decided how we shall deal with those issues.

I fear that, if the House tonight simply notes the existence of this document, we shall be told before long, "The Commons simply accepted the existence of the document. It did not express a negative view." Let us remember that we do not have the power of veto. The view of, say, the Home Office will not, in the final analysis, make all the difference. That decision will rest with the Council of Ministers.

I hope that hon. Members will not just accept the document. The right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) should press the amendment, even though it contains inadequacies. I want this House to say tonight, "We are tired of accepting documents which are not intelligently thought out and which are not acceptable to the British people." We should reject this document in a determined manner because its standard is not up to what the Commission should produce.

11.44 pm

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): I support the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone). The relevant point at issue in the draft directive is that there is not free and open competition in Europe for manufacturing industry and advertising. One cannot advertise in Belgium, and there are restrictions in Holland, Germany and France. I hope that a Council of Europe convention will address that problem.

Another important element is that of independent producers. If according to Peacock it is right to insist on 25 per cent. independent producers, we shall have to resolve the problem of how to produce European works for television.

Finally, I advise my hon. Friend the Minister that Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights maintains freedom of speech and that that is a key element. When my hon. Friend addresses the European convention, I hope that he will not look upon that as being the lowest common denominator, but as something upon which we can build to ensure——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question, That the amendment be made, *put accordingly and negatived.*

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8227/84 on the establishment of the common market for broadcasting, and 6739/86 on the co-ordination of certain provisions in Member States concerning the pursuit of broadcasting activities; and supports the Government's view that the proposed Council of Europe Convention on broadcasting provides the most appropriate means of ensuring the flow of television programmes across frontiers in Europe.

Cummins Component Plant, Darlington

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

11.47 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the closure of the Cummins component plant at Darlington and for the interest shown in this short debate by colleagues on both sides of the House, especially by my neighbours, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), and the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) who, I hope, will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The interest shown by hon. Members from both sides of the House is a reflection, partly of the importance of Cummins as a major engineering employer, not only in Darlington but on Teeside, and partly of the strength and vigour of the campaign that has been organised to try to save the plant and the skills that are associated with it. I am happy to pay tribute to the leaders of the campaign, Gerry Hunter, Ron Manning and their friends in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs.

The campaign began with a march and a rally in Darlington and continued with a lobby at Westminster and now, as we pledged, we have brought the campaign right to the heart of Government and Parliament in the House of Commons. It has been a united, non-political, campaign, but it has also been a campaign which has grown in strength and confidence as it has proceeded since the original decision was taken. The case against the closure of the plant has also grown in strength as we have proceeded and the House should consider the reasons for that.

Cummins came to Darlington as part of the commitment made by the Government of the day and by the town, that the skills involved in engineering should not be lost when the North road shops in Darlington closed, but should be retained, enhanced, developed and passed on. After 20 years we should be failing the next generation, and our children, if we set that commitment aside lightly and allowed the plant to close. If we do not fight to retain the skills of that plant, we shall betray the trust that was placed in us 20 years ago.

The Cummins company is an integral part of Darlington and is involved, not simply in traditional engineering skills, but in the evolution of those skills and their adaption to meet the challenge of new technology, and in youth training. I know of no other Darlington employer which has made such as significant and important contribution to the youth training scheme than Cummins.

That commitment is recognised by everyone. The trade unions have consistently over the years, much against their will, accepted a huge number of redundancies, restructuring and the introduction of new technology. Management, too, has accepted the challenge of modernisation and faced up to the introduction of new engines. The Government have recognised that commitment and since 1979 invested in the two plants on behalf of taxpayers some £2,931,000 in regional development grant and selective assistance.

Since the decision to close the component plant was announced, the same degree of support and commitment has been shown by the trade unions, not simply in organising the campaign that has led to this debate or in playing a leading role in the fight to save the plant on both sides of the Atlantic but by being ready at any time to discuss with management ways in which the redundancies threatened by the closure may be avoided.

That commitment has been shown, too, by management. Since its initial decision, which we still do not accept, management has put together a team to find alternative uses for the skills and to explore the possibilities of attracting further fresh investment into that plant. Darlington borough council has shown commitment by appointing immediately a consultant to help in that work and by its readiness immediately to open discussions with the company. Everybody has shown commitment in the fight to save this particular plant. Therefore, it is only fair to ask my hon. Friend the Minister: what are the Government doing to assist in this campaign?

The Minister agreed immediately last month to receive a delegation at short notice, and I am grateful to him for that. As a result, he has taken up both with Leyland Trucks and with the Ministry of Defence the possibility of further orders that lie within the power of those two bodies. He has also made clear the willingness of the Department to assist in marketing the site, should the closure go ahead.

However, I must say to my hon. Friend that the first two commitments will not be recognised, except in the medium term. We are grateful for the assistance from Leyland Trucks and the Ministry of Defence, but that will help the company only in the medium term. As for the final commitment to help market the site, I do not accept, and I am sure that the trade unions and council do not accept, that we are anywhere near ready to say, "Yes, this plant will close."

What am I asking my hon. Friend tonight? I am suggesting three ways in which his Department could assist our campaign. First, the Department could use its good offices to become involved in the work of finding alternative uses for this major, modern and prestigious plant. The Department has a trucks and components division and a north-east regional office. If the company could put together a team to find alternative work, if the borough council could install a consultant, and if the trade unions were willing to help in the process, could not the Department second a man into the team to decide whether alternative uses can be found for the investment to which the taxpayer has already contributed heavily?

Secondly, will my hon. Friend consider an initiative from his Department on the question of component sourcing? It seems that too many United Kingdom manufacturers too easily rely on bases for components traditionally or historically sourced elsewhere in Europe or overseas. Parts of Astra cars come from Australia, Japan, Germany, Denmark and elsewhere.

Many manufacturers have pledged to reduce their overseas content. My hon. Friend's Department, perhaps acting through some of the indirect agencies that the Department use to promote British quality and design, could play a leading role in encouraging a United Kingdom initiative in reducing the amount of components that motor and truck manufacturers have to import from overseas and the rest of Europe.

Finally, I want my hon. Friend to consider whether there should be more flexibility in the regional aid package available in Darlington. I know that the regional director has been in contact with Darlington borough council and

assured it that aid is available under section 7 of the Industry Act 1972 for an intermediate area. Far too often the type of project that section 7 aid might attract has been steered by the regional office to other parts of the north-east, to the development areas with their higher rates of unemployment further north or east and not to Darlington which has only slightly lower unemployment and where the traditional skills that the projects require are located and liable to be redundant.

I do not expect an immediate reply from my hon. Friend on those three points. However, I expect the Department to play as positive and as constructive a role as it can in the important campaign.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I believe that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) have the consent of both the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and the Minister to speak.

11.57 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I welcome the opportunity to participate briefly in the debate. I thank the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) for allowing me to take part.

Earlier we debated the importance of manufacturing industry and, although the remedies from each side of the house might have differed widely, we all recognise the necessity and importance of manufacturing. Cummins is perhaps one of the best examples of manufacturing in the north-east of England. I do not think that any one would dispute the excellence of the plant or the product that Cummins produces. Indeed, I have been told that injectors produced by the Cummins component plant cost $90 less to produce than in the United States and a fuel pump costs $120 less. That is a good record on any basis.

Two factors have stood out in the Cummins campaign. First, it has had the support not just of the work force but of the town of Darlington, the local authority and the Members of Parliament with interests in the Cummins plant. Many of my constituents work at the plant and many of my neighbouring colleagues have constituents who work there. That cross-party support has been one of the most prominent features of the campaign.

The work force has been as assiduous in trying to save its jobs as it was in attempting to build the success of the company that it still serves. If anything showed the force with which the trade union side put its case in this matter, it was the offer that it made when it visited the United States to see the Cummins management. It took the trouble to go to the United States and what was put to management was a pretty impressive list of offers or inducements. The union side offered to end any demarcation problems that were causing difficulties for management, it offered to negotiate a wage freeze over a period of time giving up the productivity and annual increases to which the work force would otherwise be entitled, and it said that it would assist in any way the management wanted, either in diversification or in the introduction of new technology. That was an impressive performance by the Cummins work force, but it was representative of its attitude throughout the entire matter.

The company has said that it would put forward a team consisting of unions, management and consultants to see whether there is any way in which the company can diversify in order to save jobs. The company has also said that it would be prepared to go into any joint venture at the components plant in Darlington with any company that wishes to use the plant and introduce its own machinery or products.

That is not everything that we or the Cummins work force want, but there is that opportunity. There are two specific ways in which the Government can help. First—I hope that the Minister can give us some assurance—the Government must not stand in the way of any package or diversification or new products for the Cummins plant. Indeed, I hope that they will actively assist any such package, either through section 7 of the Industry Act 1972 or in any other way. Secondly, the Goverment should take a hands on, not a hands off, approach to intervention and put themselves in the position of assisting the team that will be set up. I hope that the Government will become involved in the process. There is nothing that smacks of ideology in that; it is simply a common sense approach. In a sense, I ask the Government to do what myself, the hon. Member for Darlington and other hon. Members are doing to protect the rights and interests of our constituents. I ask the Government to do that to protect not just our constituents but the country, because it is the country and our manufacturing industry that will suffer if the proposals go through in their present form.

I hope that the Government can respond in a positive way. They will have the support of both sides of the House if they do so.

12.3 am

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): As about 100 of my constituents work at Cummins, I welcome the opportunity of speaking in the debate. I should like to pay tribute to the campaign that has been waged by the Cummins work force and to the leadership given by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), who has been resourceful, imaginative and energetic, along with hon. Members of different political persuasions, in doing everything possible to deal with a difficult problem. I pay tribute to the work force for its flexibility, determination and readiness to make the changes that may be necessary to save jobs at Cummins.

The points that have been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington and the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) should be given serious and sympathetic consideration. I realise that when rationalisation appears to be necessary and desirable for a company, the role of a Government and the possibilities before them are not infinite. The Government cannot just wave a wand. However, that does not mean that they are totally without power, influence or, more particularly, the ability to assist in coming up with a package that others are more than ready to work on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington requested that serious consideration be given to using the good offices of the Department of Trade and Industry to work out alternative uses and as flexible as possible an approach to a regional aid package. That is a reasonable request. I know from my own period in the Department that that request will not fall on deaf ears.

I had occasion to deal with sourcing when I was at the Department. By persuasion, I was able to achieve a measure of success in the motor industry. The suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington that that effort should be mobilised and organised in a more formal but just as flexible way is worth considering. I hope

[Mr. Leon Brittan]

that, in the various ways, the Department will show its readiness to help those who are more than ready to help themselves and who, I hope, will be considered to have been fully and admirably assisted by their Members of Parliament.

12.5 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) on securing this Adjournment debate to discuss a matter that, obviously, is of the highest importance to his constituents. I also thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) and the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) for their contributions to the debate.

All hon. Members will agree that manufacturing is of the highest importance as the key wealth creator within our economy. I appreciate, as I was reminded by the hon. Member for Sedgefield, that this is not the occasion for a general debate on macro-economic policies or, indeed, on how various approaches have been put forward to champion the interests and provide a better environment for the manufacturing sector within our economy.

I should like to record my agreement with the proposition that manufacturing is exceedingly important. It is the key wealth creator within our economy. In that context, I listened with great sympathy to the arguments deployed by the three speakers in the debate. I fully understand and appreciate the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington about the decision of the Cummins engine company to close its components plant in his constituency by the end of 1987 or early 1988. As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State received a delegation from Darlington on 10 November last year, and that was within a fortnight of the company announcing its decision on 28 October. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that this rapid response clearly demonstrates the Government's concern for his constituents who are currently employed at the components plant and for all who are affected by the company's decision. As we were reminded earlier, this issue has occupied the attention of Darlington and, indeed, many hon. Members.

As my hon. Friend will be well aware, the various parties have brought the decision of the company to the direct attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I can say with confidence that the Government fully appreciate the anxieties that that decision has brought to those affected by it. Therefore, I am grateful for this opportunity to make known to the House the Government's equal concern and to make clear their position on the company's decision.

Of course, it has been the consistent policy of the Government to create a climate in which industry can prosper. I do not intend to refer in detail to the various policies, but our policies recognise the importance of manufacturing. We accept that a healthy manufacturing sector can provide the basis for an expansion of employment in a local economy and, indeed, in the economy as a whole. As a result, we now have a much more favourable climate in which industry can operate.

The House will, of course, appreciate that it is for industry to operate in that climate and not the Government. The Government cannot seek to intervene in the commercial matters of private companies and it is not for the Government to intervene in the decision of the Cummins engine company to close its component plant at Darlington. As painful as it may be, this is a decision which only the company can properly take in the light of its commercial judgment.

Similarly, it would be quite inappropriate for the Department to intervene in such commercial matters as the marketing of Cummins engines. It is for potential customers to judge for themselves the engines they want in their vehicles, and that applies to the Ministry of Defence as much as to any other potential customers. It is the customer who makes the demand for a particular engine and not necessarily the supplier of the vehicle. Certainly, it is not a matter for the Government generally.

My hon. Friend has correctly referred to the Government assistance which Cummins has received in respect of the components plant. I must explain that, in respect of the components factory, an offer of selective assistance under section 7 of the Industry Act 1972 was made in October 1980. That Act made no provision, for example, for the recovery of any assistance paid under it and it would not be appropriate to seek to recover that assistance should the components plant in fact close. Similarly, the plant has been the beneficiary of regional development grants, but again it would not be appropriate to seek to recover those grants.

In announcing its decision on 28 October last year, the Cummins engine company said that it had for several years been pursuing a vigorous policy of reducing costs, enhancing quality and improving performance to ensure that the company maintained its position as a leading international diesel manufacturer. It explained that the present industry overcapacity and the additional impact of new manufacturing technology had led it to take action to reduce further its manufacturing floor space and thus its costs. This had led to the decisions to close the company's components plant and its parts distribution facilities in north America and also the components plant at Darlington by the end of 1987 or early 1988.

These arguments by a company with substantial manufacturing capacity in this country reflect the need for industry to be internationally competitive in terms of price, quality and performance. Only in this way can companies of any sort hope to secure their long-term future. The Government are also confident that the company, which said that minimising the number of people who will be affected by the closure of the components plant at Darlington will be a prime consideration, will indeed bear in mind the concerns of those people.

I have referred to the fact that Cummins is closing two of its facilities in north America and I would remind the House that the company is an important United Kingdom employer. It employs some 2,500 people in this country —in Darlington, Daventry and Shotts, near Glasgow— and, as I have already said, is committed to minimising the number of people who will be affected by the closure of the plant. Certainly, I am satisfied that there has been no question of targeting the redundancies on the United Kingdom. Some 1,500 people are losing their jobs with the company in America.

I turn to future grants and to future proposals that may come from the company. Grants are available in the Darlington assisted area on a selective basis to help

companies undertaking manufacturing or service projects which create or safeguard employment and also have an identifiable regional and national benefit. Some projects may also qualify for assistance from European funds. The Government, in designating Darlington an assisted area, have recognised the special circumstances of the area, and the selective assistance available provides an incentive for companies to consider Darlington in preference to other non-assisted areas.

My hon. Friend knows that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, following his meeting with the delegation from Darlington, asked the Department's north-east regional office to work with Cummins and all those concerned with the promotion of Darlington and the region generally to make sure the attractions of the modern components factory, should it close, are well known to interested parties. Subsequently, the regional director and his staff have kept in close touch with the Cummins management at Darlington and the borough council. The Department will certainly continue to offer all the help and advice it can.

I can also inform the House that my officials have been in touch with Cummins today to discuss further the company's position. I understand that Cummins has established an internal committee that includes management and union representatives, advised by an outside consultant nominated by the Darlington borough council, with the aim of seeking alternative work for the components plant or the area, in an endeavour to minimise any redundancies which may be declared.

I also understand that the company is not planning an immediate closure but an orderly phasing out of its work at the components plant. Of course, it must be recognised that in its need to maintain competitiveness the company must act in accordance with its commercial judgment and it would be wrong for me to suggest that the company should delay closure of the plant if its present efforts to find alternative work for it fail.

A number of questions have been raised and I am sure that hon. Members would expect, at least, a preliminary response. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington raised three points. He asked me to consider the question of secondment, to consider an initiative on component sourcing, and to consider the flexibility of the regional aid package. I shall consider his observations most carefully and I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand why, after full consideration of his questions, I should like to respond to him in a letter. I am grateful to him for giving advance notice of those issues in this Adjournment debate. I will endeavour to give him a comprehensive response.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield asked whether, if the Cummins position were to change, the DTI would refrain from standing in the way of any diversification plans that might be brought forward by Cummins. I trust I have stated his point correctly. I understand that he wants to know whether we would adopt a positive attitude to entertaining applications under section 7 of the 1972 Act. If the company's position were to change and it came forward with projects that complied with the guidelines, well known to the company, we would consider our position. In advance of those circumstances, there is no preliminary negative attitude from the Department.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks asked us to be vigilant in considering alternative uses for what is a magnificent site. I have not visited the plant, but on two recent visits to Teesside I have seen it and I can vouch for the fact that it is a magnificent facility.

I have faced similar problems in my constituency, and I can understand why the hon. Member for Sedgefield, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks and my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington wish, beyond all else, that that magnificent facility should continue to be staffed by the existing work force. I have explained that for the Government—

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seventeen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 21 January 1987

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Philippines

1. **Mrs. Shields** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to support the Government of the Philippines in their attempt to establish lasting peace and democracy.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tim Renton): We continue to offer our strong support to President Aquino and her Government in their efforts to consolidate democracy and to bring about national reconciliation in the Philippines.

Mrs. Shields: In view of the pressure from some quarters to make the Government of the Philippines abandon negotiations and opt for a military solution to their problems, will the Minister say that the Government fully support the process of negotiation? Will he also ask his EEC colleagues to make a European statement of support for that process?

Mr. Renton: We fully support the process of negotiation in which President Aquino is currently involved. We also fully support her efforts to bring the Philippines back to being a fully democratic state and the process of national reconcilation in which she is engaged. This was very much the spirit behind the statement issued by the Community last November, and we will certainly consult our European Community colleagues if a further statement along the lines suggested by the hon. Lady will be helpful.

Mr. Soames: In acknowledging the importance of the Philippines in the general region, does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that, if possible, Britain should be able to contribute through the Overseas Development Agency to any development projects that may seem to be to our advantage?

Mr. Renton: Yes. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that since President Aquino's Government came to power we have doubled our bilateral aid to the Philippines to about £425,000 for the current year and are planning to increase it to £545,000 for the year ahead. We are especially looking for projects such as consultancies in agriculture and development through which we can help the Philippines. I am sure that that is exactly in line with what my hon. Friend would like us to do.

Mr. Forth: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the so-called President of the Philippines lost the only election ever held and has not been legitimately elected, and that the best solution to the problems of the Philippines would be a legitimate and proper election?

Mr. Renton: With respect to my hon. Friend, I do not think that his comments are helpful. A plebiscite is to be held on 2 February on the new constitutional developments in the Philippines and at that time the people of the Philippines will have the opportunity to give their verdict on the reforms that President Aquino has introduced.

Mr. Anderson: As opposed to the Marcos tendency on the Government side, may we give our full pledge of support by any means to strengthen democracy in the Philippines? As the Minister is aware that the Government of the Philippines are seeking to diversify their foreign relations because of their very pervasive dependence on the United States of America, will he take further initiatives in the EEC as a partial counterweight to that United States influence? Given the importance of multisectoral organisations in the Philippines and their wide spread, will the Minister try, in our aid policies, to use the non-governmental organisations in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Renton: I know that the hon. Gentleman has just returned from the Philippines, and I hope that he had a useful and constructive visit. From that recent experience of the Philippines he will be aware of the great and continuing importance of the Americans there. They give large amounts of aid and there is also the militarily important presence of their bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay, particularly as a counter-reaction to the Russian base at Cam Ranh in Vietnam.

The European Community's aid has already increased substantially, and I understand that Commissioner Cheysson is looking at means of increasing it further. The hon. Gentleman's point about the involvement of non-governmental organisations is a good one, and I shall certainly pass it on to my hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to see whether the NGOs can be used further.

Argentina

3. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has taken any steps to improve relations with the Government of Argentina since the announcement of the Falkland Islands exclusive fishing zone.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): While making it plain that sovereignty is not for negotiation, I have repeatedly reaffirmed our willingness to work for a multilateral solution on fisheries and for progress on other practical issues.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is it not within the great traditions of British diplomacy and foreign policy that if, when faced with a change of Government towards democracy in a country with which we have been in conflict, and with a conciliatory and flexible response such as we had from that Government on 17 November, we should be prepared to make a detailed form of response to that Government to engage in discussions? Should we not contemplate a solution to an intractible problem that is costing the country many millions of pounds each year?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It would be in accordance with the high traditions of diplomacy, to which the hon. Gentleman has kindly referred, and in the tradition of sensible diplomacy, not to embark on any discussions on the basis of any false premise or false expectations, which is why we have always excluded from the agenda negotiation on sovereignty. Beyond that, the tables of my opposite number, Foreign Minister Caputo, and of President Alfonsin, are positively groaning with proposal after proposal for discussion of all the other issues of a wholly constructive kind.

Mr. Crouch: May I suggest to my right hon. and learned Friend that he should continue to stress the importance of our willingness to re-establish friendly relations with Argentina, notwithstanding our understandable — they should understand this too — feelings that there can be no question of discussion of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands at this stage? But a reiteration of our willingness to re-establish friendly relations with Argentina should continue, and I believe that it could be successful.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I entirely agree with the approach commended by my hon. Friend. Our position has consistently been that the intractible question of sovereignty should not stand in the way of the development of more normal relations in every other respect. Throughout my recent visit to Mexico, Columbia and other countries in the region I emphasised time and time again the approach commended by my hon. Friend. I think that our approach is widely and increasingly understood.

Mr. Haynes: Does the Foreign Secretary know what is going on down there? Is he aware that, unfortunately, I had to make a visit to the Falkland Islands where I met councillors who want to go back to the pre-1982 situation. If that is the case, why are we spending hundreds of millions of pounds down there, but refusing pensioners a free television licence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is always encouraging to receive a message from the hon. Gentleman couched in characteristically straightforward terms. The inhabitants of the Falkland Islands recognise that Argentina's actions in 1982 destroyed the foundations of the good relations that previously existed, and they look to Her Majesty's Government to provide defence on the basis on which we are prepared to go on doing so.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will my right hon. and learned Friend reiterate today that the British Government would not have taken the action that they did in the exclusion zone if the Argentine Government had not steadfastly refused to have a multilateral agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Indeed. My hon. Friend is right. We emphasised over a long period our willingness and desire to establish a multilateral system of conservation. That is why we took the matter to the Food and Agriculture Organisation. We still want to move on from the present position to a more broadly agreed system of fishery conservation.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the American Government are worried about dangers that arise from the Soviet's failure to recognise the unilateral fisheries regime that he has declared? As the Foreign Secretary has reaffirmed that he would prefer a multilateral agreement, why did he rebuff Argentina's approach of 17 November? Why is he not taking up the offer for informal talks in the United States now? Will he talk seriously with Mr. Habib, who, it is reported, will want to discuss the issue? What practical action will he take to obtain some agreement on this which will prevent the possibility of some clash arising with the Soviet vessels in the south Atlantic, which all of us want to avoid?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sure that everyone is anxious to avoid any clash arising in relation to fisheries conservation in the south Atlantic. That is why the clash that occurred between Argentine and Taiwanese vessels last year was a matter of such great regret. It is for that reason that we have been in touch with all the nations concerned in the region, including the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has said that it will conduct itself in a fashion not inconsistent with our claims in the area, and a large number of nations, including, for example, Poland, have already, through their firms, applied for and been granted licences.

Beyond that, we are, of course, anxious to respond sensibly to any possibility of moving towards the establishment of a multilateral regime. It is a topic on which we make our view clear to many nations, as I have already said, and on which we hearken to the possibility of progress, but where we have to proceed with prudence if we are not to run the risk of abortive contact of the kind that took place in Berne some two years ago.

Falkland Islands

4. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has given any consideration to a scheme to compensate any Falkland Islanders wishing resettlement following the conclusion of an agreement with Argentina on the future of the Falklands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): No. The Falkland Islanders have consistently made clear through their elected representatives their wish to remain in the Falklands under British sovereignty.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as we shall be spending one third of a million pounds this year for every Falkland Islands citizen, that we shall have spent since 1982 nearly £2 million on every Falkland Island citizen and we simply cannot afford it, is it not now about time that we considered some sort of resettlement grant for people in the Falkland Islands, giving them the option either to stay or to emigrate from those islands under a negotiated settlement with Argentina?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the Falkland Islanders wish to remain in the Falklands under British sovereignty. They have always had the option to leave the Falkland Islands and come to this country if they so wished. The fact is that they have not wished, and, indeed, the population in the Falklands has increased, not decreased, since the conflict.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that in a world where democracy is in a minority it would be a mistake ever to give up simply because the balance sheet said that we could not afford it? If we could not afford a democracy, we would never have had it. It is not something on a balance sheet.

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Canavan: Could the Foreign Office not take some steps to resettle Sir Rex Hunt in some remote territory, because, despite being deprived of his colonial governor's hat, he seems to be strutting around all over the place making stupid statements and doing his best to torpedo any chance of a reasonable, peaceful negotiated settlement betwen Britain and Argentina on the future of the Falkland Islands?

Mr. Eggar: Sir Rex Hunt gave distinguished service in the Falkland Islands and I am frankly amazed that the hon. Gentleman believes in curtailing the freedom of speech.

Mr. Stokes: Is my hon. Friend aware that the previous question was, typically, most mischievous? *[Interruption.]* Is there no question of the Falkland Islanders living there if they wish to, or going elsewhere if they wish to? Why such a defeatist question? Whose side is the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on—England's or Argentina's?

Mr. Eggar: It is both mischievous and typical, and the House in its response to my hon. Friend's question has given its answer.

Chile

5. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will recall Her Majesty's ambassador to Chile for consultations on United Kingdom relations with opposition parties there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No. Our policy is to bring about the early restoration of democracy in Chile; to maintain close contact with opposition leaders; and to encourage Opposition leaders' efforts to open a full dialogue with the Chilean Government.

Mr. Lamond: What is all this about our ambassador interfering in the internal elections of the Chile Christian Democratic party by trying to push the chances of the extreme Right-wing contestant, unsuccessfully as it happened? There are even rumours that the Right-wing party has been obtaining money from the British Tory party. Which side are we on, Pinochet's or Britain's?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has a fertile imagination. We are on the side of improving human rights within Chile. We have consistently backed support for the national opposition parties.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be much better for our excellent ambassador to remain in place to monitor that Government's decision last week to allow political parties again, after 13 years without them, to monitor a return of exiles to Chile, and to improve our already good relations with that country, which has a serious terrorist threat fomented and actively supported by Cuba and other countries?

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The presence of an ambassador in Santiago is the best way available to us of ensuring that pressure for change can be applied at the highest levels. I notice that the views of Labour Members contrast significantly with the way in which they constantly urge us to increase our representation in Managua.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In the light of an earlier supplementary question, will the Minister take this chance to deny categorically that the ambassador was involved in paving the way for the rumoured coup against Pinochet, in which the United States is supposed to have been involved, in order to replace him with a Christian Democrat?

Mr. Eggar: That is a purely hypothetical question. I am not even aware of the reports.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister recall that the Prime Minister recently invited released Soviet dissidents to No. 10 Downing street? Will the Minister therefore encourage the Prime Minister to demonstrate her evenhandedness by also inviting to No. 10 Downing street Pedro Fernandez Lembach, who arrived back in the United Kingdom last year after a campaign here to get him released from Pinochet's jail? Now that he is back in the United Kingdom he should also be welcomed to No. 10 Downing street like the Soviet dissidents.

Mr. Eggar: May I wish the hon. Gentleman a happy birthday. I shall not divulge his age to the House. We very much appreciate the role that he, among other hon. Members on both sides of the House, played in urging the Chilean Government to release Pedro Lembach. I have made clear to the Chilean Government our welcome for that release.

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

6. **Mr. Jackson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made during Britian's presidency of the European Community in promoting the Community's position in international affairs.

7. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European Community partners concerning the development of common European foreign policies.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Twelve spoke and acted together on a wide range of international issues during the British presidency. Significant achievements during the period included: common action against Syria's involvement in terrorism, which I announced on 10 November; active co-operation on East-West issues, in particular, in achieving the successful outcome of the Stockholm Conference; and a common position on South Africa based on promoting peaceful change through national dialogue. A fuller list of presidency achievements has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend knows well that Conservative Members appreciate the success of the British presidency and, notably, the contribution of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Is he satisfied that the European voice is being heard with sufficient clarity and weight in the great debate about arms control between the United States and the Soviet Union?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The answer to that is yes. The Community voice speaks on defence issues outside its constitution, but it speaks on security questions, including arms control aspects of that through political co-operation and, beyond that, through the participation of 11 of 12 members in the councils of NATO. In all those ways, not

least through the contribution made by the United Kingdom, the voice of the Community on these important questions is being heard loud and clear.

Mr. Knox: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that greater co-operation within the Community on foreign affairs remains the Government's principal foreign policy objective?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Yes, I can confirm that. On a large range of issues the position that we wish to make clear and assert is likely to be more effectively asserted and maintained by presenting it in a Community context.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Will the Foreign Secretary tell us what successes the European Community has had in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that the European Community has been more successful than any of the other parties concerned with that tragic conflict, which has continued for many years. We have certainly been applying our attention to measures that can improve the situation. It was as a result of a British initiative during the British presidency that the Community adopted measures to enhance Community aid and Community trade access for those living in the occupied territories on the West Bank.

Mr. Deakins: Have any of the anodyne statements made by the EEC in recent years under the heading of political co-operation led to the resolution of any international problem?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: To take one example to which we have been referring, the position adopted by the Community on the Arab-Israeli dispute, as set out in the Venice declaration, has represented a continuing lodestone of guidance for the many who have tried to advance the position. It has been a significant and sustained contribution.

Mr. Walters: I recognise the advances on many issues which have taken place during my right hon. and learned Friend's presidency, but the progress in the middle east has been disappointing. Will he take the opportunity of Mr. Peres's visit to reaffirm that British policy and European policy have not changed, that we appreciate that there cannot be a settlement in the middle east without recognising Palestinian rights, and that the continuing Israeli occupation of the West Bank is illegal?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly be taking the opportunity of discussing these matters with Foreign Minister Peres during his visit to London, on the basis of the well-established principles of the right of the state of Israel to secure a peaceful existence and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and proper representation in any discussion of the future.

Mr. Healey: In the right hon. and learned Gentleman's new capacity as a pedler of lodestones of guidance, does he believe that it would be wise for the Community to take a much more public and consistent line on the major issues of arms control that are now under discussion between the United States and the Soviet Union? Can he explain why the Prime Minister did not follow Chancellor Kohl's lead in deploring President Reagan's decision to violate the SALT 2 agreement and welcoming Mr. Gorbachev's decision not to follow President Reagan's lead?

Secondly, on the strategic defence initiative, on which I believe the European countries have a consistent and common view that is very different from that of the present American Administration, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman allay some of the disquiet that is felt on the Opposition Benches and elsewhere at the Prime Minister's recent retreat from her initial agreement at Camp David on SDI with President Reagan? Can he say that Her Majesty's Government unequivocally expect the United States to observe the ABM treaty in its pursuit of its star wars initiative in the restricted interpretation which has been endorsed by those who negotiated the treaty in the United States?

Thirdly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long".] These are possibly the most important issues which this or any other Government are likely to face over the next few years. Thirdly, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman seek an agreement with his Community colleagues to take an initiative towards achieving agreement on a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests by seeking an agreement which, by stages, would progressively limit the yield and frequency of such tests?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman has resorted—understandably, and I make no criticism—to asking a question about arms control as an earlier question was not asked.

Mr. Healey: Where was the alliance spokesman when he should have asked his question?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman and I are on common ground.

With regard to progress on SALT 2, the Prime Minister confirmed to the House on 18 November last that, in our judgment, the SALT agreement should continue to be observed by both sides. That remains our decision.

With regard to SDI, one of the components of the first Camp David agreement is that that programme should be pursued in accordance with the provisions of the ABM treaty. United States policy is that the broad interpretation is justified. However, SDI research is being continued within the restricted interpretation, and that should be welcomed.

On the right hon. Gentleman's last point about the test ban treaty, we welcome the specific progress made at Reykjavik, which provided, in our judgment rather hopefully, for a phased approach to nuclear tests. That was consistent with our policy. That approach will start with the threshold test ban treaty and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy treaty and beyond that to the remaining stages on verification issues. That is how such progress should be made.

Afghanistan (Chemical Weapons)

8. **Mr. Bright** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any evidence of the use of chemical weapons by the Soviets in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We are aware of reports of use of chemical weapons by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. We regret that independent investigation of reports of use of chemical weapons in that country has not proved possible, but we believe that at least some form of incapacitating agent has been used by Soviet forces there. This underlines

the importance of early agreement on a comprehensive and global chemical weapons ban, and, of course, the early withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Mr. Bright: Bearing in mind the attitude of the Soviet Union towards chemical weapons and the growing concern about their use, especially in the middle east, can any light be shed on some general progress towards the control of those weapons that are especially nasty? Most people certainly believe that it is as important to control chemical weapons as it is to control nuclear weapons.

Mr. Renton: I agree with my hon. Friend that any report of the use of chemical weapons is very disturbing, especially in the middle east, and their use in the Iran-Iraq war. We are slowly making progress in Geneva towards a comprehensive ban on the production and stocking of chemical weapons. My hon. Friend will be aware that the British Government, at that conference last summer, tabled their own initiative on the crucial question of challenge inspection. There is still a great deal of hard pounding to be done about the detail of our proposals and we shall continue to discuss those matters in the weeks and months ahead in the hope of making further progress.

Mr. Ron Brown: While Afghanistan has suffered from black propaganda in the past, which has alleged all sorts of atrocities—many people suffer in a civil war—may I ask the Minister at least to welcome Dr. Najib's ceasefire proposals, which would lead to an early withdrawal of Soviet troops? Will he go further and invite the Afghan leaders to London to discuss and encourage that initiative? If the Minister wants peace, why does he not encourage it?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman can accuse us of many things, but I do not think that he can accuse us of controlling *Jane's Defence Weekly*, including the issue of 22 November, which reported the further use of chemical weapons by Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's wider point, the Soviet ambassador came to my office yesterday afternoon to discuss the recent proposals surrounding the ceasefire. I made it abundantly clear that we would welcome any move that could lead to the halting of the bitter fighting in Afghanistan over the past seven years. At the end of the day, we trust that those moves will lead to a Government in Kabul who are truly representative of all the Afghan people and not just of the Communist party, and that they will also lead to the early and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Mr. Lawler: When my hon. Friend next meets the Soviet ambassador, will he draw to his attention — indeed, I draw this to the attention of Opposition Members — the experience directly related to me last week by an Afghan refugee of the use of chemical weapons by Soviet forces? When my hon. Friend meets the Pakistan ambassador on his arrival in this country in the next few weeks, perhaps he could discuss with him the level of British aid to Afghan refugees, given that they are still arriving to the tune of about 79,000 a month.

Mr. Renton: I note carefully what my hon. Friend has said. We have contributed many millions of aid to the Afghan refugees over the last six years, and I should like to take the opportunity to express the support that I am sure the whole House feels for the very great effort that Pakistan has made to take Afghan refugees, notably into the North-West Frontier Province, where there are more than 3 million refugees. That is one of the largest settlements of refugees in the world.

Mr. Winnick: As a sponsor of the early-day motion in January 1980 opposing Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, may I point out to the Minister that I have not changed by view and that I, for one, am very pleased that what the Russians have done in that country has not succeeded? If the new Soviet leadership wants to show good faith, it should withdraw completely from Afghanistan, but does the Minister agree that it is somewhat odd for people who defended and justified the Suez aggression and what the Americans did in Vietnam to be critical of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan?

Mr. Renton: I am pleased to find myself in unusual agreement with the hon. Gentleman on the first part of his question. Perhaps he will make his point of view better known to his hon. Friends further down the Benches so that they, too, may have an unusual alliance. I agree that it is extremely important that the Soviet troops should withdraw totally as part and parcel of the movement towards a genuinely representative Government in Kabul. On the second part of his question, I do not agree with him. I cannot see any analogy in what he says. Let me remind him that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has caused 5 million people to leave that country. There has been no such exodus of refugees elsewhere in recent times. That is one reason why we look very much at the moment for a total withdrawal of the Soviet troops.

EC (United Kingdom Presidency)

9. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements made during Britian's presidency of the European Community.

11. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on achievements secured during Britain's presidency of the European Community.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): A full account of achievements under the United Kingdom presidency has been placed in the Library of the House. Among the most important, I would emphasise the crucial importance of agreement on common agricultural policy reform; the adoption of more internal market measures than in any previous half year; and the adoption of an action programme for employment growth and agreement on measures to help small businesses.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the Government side of the House on the very significant achievements made by herself and by the Secretary of State and other Ministers during the extremely important period of our presidency? Will she also accept our congratulations on developing the action programme for small and medium-sized businesses to promote enterprise and employment both in this country and in the Community as a whole? In regard to African affairs, does she agree that the progress on relations with the front-line states has made a significant contribution to stability in that region?

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks to my right hon. and learned Friend, myself

and other Ministers who have been in the forefront of activity during the last six months of the British presidency. I am particularly glad that the help for small businesses, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General has pushed so hard, has been agreed and that Finance Ministers were able in November to make available new loan facilities worth over £1 billion for small firms to help them get access to the new technology which they so much need. Proposals have also been made for the VAT threshold for small businesses to be increased, making it easier for small firms to establish themselves. The action programme on employment which was adopted in December will also help people starting their businesses and provide assistance with training and counselling for the long-term unemployed.

On South Africa, the United Kingdom presidency led the 12, in their wish to take positive measures, to help the front-line states by co-ordinating our activity. We have, of course, announced additional help of over £15 million over five years for southern Africa and £12 million for black South Africans. I might add that the European Community allocation for 1987 is 15 mecu compared with 10 mecu in 1986.

Dr. Clark: I, too, would like to congratulate my hon. Friend and her colleagues on their achievements during the British presidency, especially on the 48 achievements which are listed in the document which is to be found in the Library. May I ask where there was any achievement to ease the movement of commercial vehicles across internal frontiers and customs posts in the Community?

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Achieving 48 measures concerning the internal market was a record that has never been equalled by any other presidency. *[Laughter.]* As the aim is to help business and employment throughout the Community, I should have thought that this was a serious matter, not a humourous one. Progress has been made with border facilities, in that we shall reduce the number of documents needed from 17 to 1. We hope that further improvements will be made during the next few months under the Belgian presidency.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Minister agree that the British presidency would have been greatly enhanced if it had been marked by British entry to the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system and by a clear commitment to proportional representation for the next European elections? Has the Minister observed that both those propositions are strongly supported by the President of the European Parliament, Sir Henry Plumb, who I should like to congratulate?

Mrs. Chalker: I am sure that the whole House will join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating Sir Henry Plumb on his election as President of the European Parliament. *[Interruption.]* As for the exchange rate mechanism, of course the Government recognise the European and national political and economic advantages of joining it, but the Government have made clear their wish to do so when the balance of the argument is in favour of entry. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that one of the difficulties is that sterling, like the German deutschmark, is a widely traded currency. There is at present only one such currency in the exchange rate mechanism, and the introduction of a second could put it under strain. That would be damaging to the whole of the European Community. That is why we need to be sure that the circumstances are right.

I note what the hon. Gentleman said about proportional representation. I have noted carefully the views of the President of the European Parliament, and I shall see him tomorrow to discuss his views further.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister not believe that Britain's reputation in Europe and elsewhere has been seriously damaged by the Foreign Office spending British taxpayers' money on inviting two South African Nationalist Members of Parliament to visit Britain? They represent a country which has detained hundreds of people, including young children, which has a propaganda regime that would be the envy of Dr. Goebbels, and which has launched aggressive acts against neighbouring, independent and sovereign states.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman and the House will know that I hold no brief for the South African Government. I have to say, however, that the Central Office of Information has a number of sponsored visits, which are to exchange information. They are made available widely to a large number of people with whom the Government would not necessarily agree. Following the policy that, to extend dialogue and to try to influence cannot be a bad thing, I think that the exchanges which those two people have obviously had with people in the United Kingdom will have been nothing but a force for good to help impress on the South African Government the views of the British Government and people about that Government's actions at present.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Were any steps taken during our presidency to achieve a common European view towards encouraging some sort of compromise between the United States and the Soviet Union over the strategic defence initiative, bearing in mind that, in the end, strategic arms control and disarmament depend on such a compromise?

Mrs. Chalker: As my right hon. and learned Friend said this afternoon, this matter does not fall within the competence of European political co-operation or the European Community. Obviously, Ministers have had discussions in Western European Union and other forums. We work closely together on issues of such major importance to every country concerned. We shall continue to do so, but within the European Community this aspect does not arise.

Mr. Pike: How can the Minister claim that reforms of the common agricultural policy are an achievement when the majority still view the common agricultural policy as a disaster, damaging to the economy, and a lead weight around the neck of the Common Market, dragging it down to bankruptcy? When will the Government take positive steps to reform that policy?

Mrs. Chalker: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman has been recently, but my right hon. and learned Friend and I and many other Ministers have repeatedly said that reform of the common agricultural policy was not only urgent but vital for the future of the Community. That is why, at the December meeting of Agriculture Ministers, we agreed on an 8·5 per cent. cut in milk quotas over the next 15 months, plus a further 1 per cent. to be taken out

of production through the increase in the super levy and the tighter application of quota arrangements. We will make a total cut of 9·5 per cent. in the milk quota.

Further, we have agreed that, with that reduction in milk production, there will be a major stock disposal scheme for 1 million tonnes of butter, and we shall cut back by about 165,000 tonnes the amount of beef being brought into intervention: These measures will save £1·3 billion over the next three years. That was done under the British presidency. We are determined to reform the common agricultural policy, and we had agreement in the Community, under our presidency, to do so.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that if the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) had cared to attend the Foreign Affairs Select Committee session this morning he would have heard a fruitful and honest discussion with one of the South African Members of Parliament to whom he referred, which might lead towards a peaceful and amicable solution to the South African problem in due course?

Mrs. Chalker: I am delighted to hear from my hon. Friend that such a discussion took place during the Foreign Affairs Select Committee meeting this morning. It entirely bears out my answer to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that discussion should take place and that we can influence matters if we lift our eyes above the low parapet at which he sets his.

Mr. George Robertson: Is not the legacy of the British presidency of the European Community a financial shambles, which means that the European Community still has no agreed budget for 1987? A trade war with the United States of America is looming and it threatens to cause long-term damage to European and United States relations. *[Interruption.]* When Conservative Members do not want to hear certain points, the heckling starts. The superficial deal on agriculture prices has still not spared us the spectacle of huge stocks of cauliflowers being destroyed simply to hoist their price to the consumer. Is that not the real, poor record to set against the 48 propaganda points that have been circulated among Conservative Members?

Mrs. Chalker: There is no time when the hon. Gentleman is less convincing than when he tries to pull holes in a real and certain achievement. Indeed, there have been achievements. It is right that there is no Community budget for 1987 at present. The Council of Ministers has refused to agree a budget that exceeds the minimun rate of increase laid down in the budgetary procedure. A budget cannot be adopted in the absence of Council agreement. We can proceed on the basis of one twelfth, which allows the Community at least to get on with some of its business. The Community has taken a firm stand over United States trade relations. The Commission has our full support in the present negotiations. We shall do our level best to reach a negotiated agreement that will make retaliatory measures unnecessary.

Sir Anthony Grant: Now that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has finished a most distinguished period in the presidency of the Community, will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office apply its mind to the broader Europe of the 21 countries of the Council of Europe, which are very much concerned with the problem of human rights—in fact, much more so than the Community? Will my right hon. and learned Friend persuade his colleagues in the Council of Ministers to be much less stingy with the amount of money that they make available to that important organisation?

Mrs. Chalker: We are extremely appreciative of the excellent work that the Council of Europe has done, not only on human rights, but on the drugs issue. I shall carefully bear my hon. Friend's comments in mind.

Afghanistan (Human Rights)

14. **Mr. Rost** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about human rights in Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: Large-scale violations of human rights continue. These are documented in the recent report of the United Nations special rapporteur. A report by Amnesty International includes accounts of the complicity of Soviet personnel in the torture of prisoners. We are deeply concerned at these allegations and have made that concern clear to the Soviet Government.

Mr. Rost: What representations can my hon. Friend make about the dreadful, shameful plight of the refugees?

Mr. Eggar: We have obviously given considerable assistance to Afghan refugees. There are 5 million refugees outside Afghanistan — more than one third of the population in 1979. We are continuing to assist in meeting their needs. Of course, the answer to the refugees' plight is the withdrawal of the occupying Soviet forces which still remain in Kabul and outside it.

Mr. Heffer: Although I totally accept the idea that we must make it absolutely clear to the Soviet Government that we are in favour of human rights in Afghanistan and elsewhere in eastern Europe, will the Minister assure us that the Government will not adopt a double standard but will be in favour of human rights in places such as Chile, Guatemala and South Africa, and that they will not take a one-sided view of human rights, as Conservative Members often do?

Mr. Eggar: If the Soviet Union and the Kabul regime now wish to permit a genuine settlement to bring peace and freedom to the Afghan people and to enable them to determine their own future, we, of course, would welcome that change of heart, but so far we have little evidence of a determination to bring about a final, peaceful settlement in Afghanistan.

Mr. Heffer: Give us the answer.

Mr. Eggar: With regard to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we condemn human rights violations wherever they may take place.

Mr. Terlezki: In relation to the violation of human rights in Afghanistan and the 5 million refugees in Pakistan who are sheltering there and are not able to return to their own country, does my hon. Friend agree that at the Vienna conference the Soviet Union must be reminded time and time again that the 5 million refugees in Pakistan must all be able to return home and that the 5 million people in the Soviet Union who are in slave labour camps and psychiatric hospitals must also be released?

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I assure him that at the Vienna CSCE conference our

delegation and I—I was there just before Christmas—have taken every possible opportunity to bring the attention of the Soviet authorities to human rights abuses in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

Vietnamese Refugees

15. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Vietnamese refugees there are in Hong Kong; how many landed there in 1986; and how many are in closed camps.

Mr. Renton: On 1 January 1987 there were 8,039 Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong, of whom 4,527 were in closed camps. There were 2,074 arrivals in 1986, and 3,816 refugees from Hong Kong camps were resettled elsewhere, so that the number in the camps fell by 1,742 in the course of the year.

Mr. Dubs: Does the Minister agree that there is an urgent need for further international discussions to get people out of those camps, and that other countries can be expected to accept some refugees only if Britain sets a lead? Will the Minister confirm that there is no intention of repatriating those Vietnamese refugees who are in the camps in Hong Kong, and that there is no intention of ever turning away any further refugees who arrive by boat in Hong Kong?

Mr. Renton: I should like to stress that Britain has a good record for accepting refugees from Indo-China. We have accepted almost 20,000 refugees, including 12,000 from Hong Kong. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the continuing arrival of refugees in Hong Kong is a matter of great concern to the people and the Government of Hong Kong. Therefore, we are consulting other major resettlement countries and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to see what can further be done at present.

The issue of repatriation to Vietnam was mentioned in a recent debate in the Legislative Council in Hong Kong. The hon. Gentleman and I will agree on the fact that repatriation to Hong Kong can take place only when we and other major resettlement countries are much more convinced than we are now about, for example, human rights in Vietnam and how such migrants would be treated and looked after if they went back to Vietnam.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Can my hon. Friend tell the House how many of the refugees in Hong Kong are fleeing from the unemployment and depressed economic conditions in Vietnam and are not, in any way, political refugees? Having made that assessment—I hope that he has made it, and if he has not I hope that he will do so—will he arrange for those people quickly to be returned to Vietnam with guarantees from the Vietnam Government about their human rights? It is clearly wrong for Hong Kong to accept people who are fundamentally seeking economic relief from their conditions, and not political relief.

Mr. Renton: The situation is not quite as simple as my hon. Friend has set out, although I know of his deep interest in the problem. At present there is no screening of Vietnamese refugees entering Hong Kong. It would be possible to establish those refugees who are economic migrants, to use a jargon phrase, and those who are genuine political refugees only if there was such a process of detailed screening. However, even then it is questionable whether one would necessarily arrive at totally correct answers. That is one of the problems facing all the major resettlement countries. I have already discussed the situation in Vietnam when I answered a previous question, but I am sure that we could be satisfied with the prospect of returning to Vietnam those who were not political refugees only if we were more satisfied than we are now about human rights conditions in Vietnam.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Minister agree that even if he were successful, as the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) has suggested, in improving the quota of refugees accepted by different countries, including our own, there would still be a number who, because of age, lack of linguistic knowledge or narrow work experience, would find it very difficult to be resettled anywhere? What will happen to those people when the transfer of power takes place?

Mr. Renton: That is still 10 years away. However, the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on a very sensitive question. That is precisely what is worrying Hong Kong, and it is because of that problem that we are currently having further discussions with the major resettlement countries and talking to the UNHCR, which has a new dynamic commissioner, about how we shall deal with those problems in the long term.

Mr. Sims: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a moral obligation on the part of the people of the free world in Asia, as well as in America and Europe, not only towards the Vietnamese refugees, but towards the people and Government of Hong Kong, who have fed and sheltered every refugee who has appeared there and who have not turned a single one away? Is it not now time for a positive initiative to be taken by Her Majesty's Government to get international co-operation to relieve Hong Kong of the unreasonable burden that that country has had to shoulder for far too long?

Mr. Renton: I accept what my hon. Friend said. However, one should never underestimate what the major resettlement countries have done in recent years in taking refugees out of the Hong Kong camps. For example, there were 24,000 departures in 1979 and 3,800 last year. Every year a great quantity of refugees have been accepted by the major resettlement countries precisely for the reason mentioned by my hon. Friend—a sense of obligation. Obviously, we now have to look at what to do with the 8,000 refugees who remain in the camps. That is a matter of great worry to Hong Kong, as expressed in the recent Legislative Council debate, and that is precisely what we are consulting about at present.

Mr. Anderson: May I advance what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) about the case for seeking to trigger a response from our allies by our own example in relation to the Vietnamese refugees? If, as the Minister says, the long-term key to the problem lies in Hanoi, why have the Government not taken any initiative with our United States allies in seeking to open negotiations with the Vietnamese Government?

Mr. Renton: I am somewhat surprised by that question from the hon. Gentleman, who knows the situation in south-east Asia well. He knows the position on human rights in Vietnam, and he knows that Vietnam is currently supporting an invasion of Cambodia and that there are more than 100,000 Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Therefore, it is rather ridiculous to chide us for not yet

making direct approaches, with or without other countries, to Hanoi when such an intolerable human rights situation remains in Vietnam. We have to consider with other major resettlement countries whether there is a process of pressure that we can bring to bear on Vietnam under which conditions will so improve in that country, for example, by the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, that it might be possible to suggest that refugees could go back. If they were sent back at present, I am sure that no one would object more strongly than the hon. Gentleman.

Devonport Dockyard

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Archie Hamilton): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Devonport dockyard.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced yesterday, in following up an answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), that the Government are now satisfied that there exists the basis for an advantageous contract to be placed for the future operation of Devonport dockyard with Devonport Management Limited, which is a company formed by Brown and Root (UK) Limited, the Weir Group plc and Barclays de Zoete Wedd Ltd. I am sorry that the *Official Report* has not yet printed my right hon. Friend's answer. However, I did write yesterday to those Members most concerned.

All three companies in the consortium are British, but Brown and Root is a United Kingdom subsidiary of the United States Halliburton company. As the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) will recall from our discussions of the Dockyard Services Bill, the upper limit which we set for foreign shareholding in the companies bidding for the contracts was 30 per cent. In determining whether a particular shareholding should be considered foreign, account is taken of the parent companies. On that basis, Brown and Root's share in Devonport Management Ltd. has been set at 30 per cent.

The House will recall that, in our paper to the trade unions of 4 December, we announced our preferred contractor for Rosyth. My right hon. Friend is at this moment chairing a meeting with general secretaries of eight unions to hear their views on that paper, before he takes a final decision.

In forwarding the paper on Devonport to the unions yesterday, my right hon. Friend proposed a meeting with them on 13 February to discuss that paper. No contract has yet been placed, and my right hon. Friend has said that he will do so only when the unions have had an opportunity to give him their views.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): I am grateful to the Minister for making that statement. I wish that he had been able to do so for Rosyth as well when the occasion arose. However, we are disappointed—and I am sure I speak not only for Opposition Members but for the people of Devonport, who I imagine will not be represented here this afternoon. None of us is convinced by any of the claims made by the Government on the future of the dockyards. Will the Minister confirm the story in the *Western Mail* this morning that the number of redundancies likely to follow the change of contractor will be about 4,000?

Will the Minister further confirm that, although Brown and Root has only a 30 per cent. share, that is the highest possible share that it could have, given that it is American-owned, and that its secondary position in the consortium is little better than a financial fiction, as everyone knows that it will be the lead in the contractor consortium? Will the hon. Gentleman elucidate and give some information on why the Lazard group withdrew at the last possible minute—only yesterday morning—from the consortium, and was replaced by Barclays de Zoete Wedd?

Does the Minister recognise that the work force at Devonport will be angered almost beyond belief by that American takeover of their yard, and that those are loyal men, who have served their Queen and country for decades, and who resent being reduced to the level of chattel slaves, to be handed over to the Americans? That is what the transfer of undertakings involves. It is the selling of the work force; it is nothing more nor less than that. It will be opposed, as it has been throughout the campaign by both the work force and Opposition Members.

Mr. Hamilton: I shall deal first with the withdrawal of Lazard from the consortium. That must be the concern of the consortium—it must be up to the consortium to decide who its financial backers are. However, there have been changes in the make-up of all the different consortia that have been bidding for the contract.

On foreign control, as I said, we set the level of foreign shareholding for companies bidding for the dockyard contract at 30 per cent. If a foreign shareholding exceeds that level, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have the power, under the contract, to act where circumstances are contrary to the essential interests of security. My right hon. Friend could terminate the contract if he felt that to be necessary. However, we do not say that a 29 per cent. shareholding would be acceptable in all cases or that a 31 per cent. shareholding would be unacceptable. We can think of examples where even a tiny foreign shareholding would be unacceptable and where a shareholding above 30 per cent. would be acceptable.

Protection of security has always been and always will be a paramount consideration. Devonport Management Ltd is a list X company. That means that, in order to undertake classified defence work, the company has to satisfy the Government's stringent security, physical and personnel requirements, which have existed under successive Governments. There are, of course, many foreign firms that satisfy the Government's security rules.

On manpower levels, in the paper that we issued on the Government-owned plc option in September, we said that, under that option, there were likely to be reductions over a seven-year period of some 5,000 jobs in Devonport and 1,200 jobs in Rosyth. Obviously, those calculations were based on assumptions about possible improvements in efficiency and on forecasts of the amount of unallocated naval and commercial work that the company might secure. It is of significance that the preferred contractors at Devonport believe that, under their management, reductions will be measurably less.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): My hon. Friend will be aware that under the Admiral Rickover rules, non-United States citizens are not allowed to have any contact with United States navy nuclear propulsion systems. Is it correct that under the contractual arrangements that my hon. Friend has announced, there is a possibility that not only United States companies but United States citizens will be relating directly to our nuclear propulsion systems, and the SSN refitting capability at Devonport dockyard, and thus will be at a considerable advantage from a defence and commercial point of view compared with United Kingdom citizens and the United States nuclear propulsion system, with which we are not allowed to have any interface at all?

Mr. Hamilton: United States personnel might be involved, but they would be security cleared.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Will the Minister assure the House that the proposed vesting date of 1 April for the takeover by the new contractors is not set in stone? If, as seems highly unlikely, all the complicated transitional arrangements are completed by that date, will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that he will delay the takeover until all the problems can be properly sorted out?

Mr. Hamilton: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the vesting day is 6 April. We have every hope of being able to meet that date.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the major concern of Her Majesty's Government is the essential and successful future operation of the dockyard in relation to the work that has to be carried out? If that is the case, has not Brown and Root played a major part in other British developments, particularly in the North sea? It is an expert in this area. Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that, when considering the future work force, those who are already employed will be given, as far as possible, first preference for the jobs that have to be filled?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, of course I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is quite true that Brown and Root is bringing in great expertise from outside. If we consider the development of the oil potential of the western approaches, I am sure that this will be of enormous benefit to Devonport. It will remain the most important dockyard dealing with Royal Navy refits, which still remain an absolutely essential part of our capacity to keep our ships afloat.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Will the hon. Gentleman take into account the fact that this proposal, as originally put to the House of Commons, was bitterly opposed in different parts of the House and that it would have been all the more bitterly opposed on Second Reading and during the other stages if it had been suggested then that a very powerful foreign holding was to play a part in the final result? The hon. Gentleman referred to the meeting with the unions. In the light of the Government's humiliating defeat when this measure went through the House of Commons and the other place, will he give an absolute assurance that, if the work force is still opposed to this proposition, the Government will not go ahead with it, at least until the electorate has had a chance to pronounce upon it? The people of this country are not prepared to see Devonport dockyard handed over to profiteers and people who will not be able to serve the country as they have done for generations.

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. The House has made its position quite clear on this issue. I am afraid that I do not go down the road of sharing his paranoia of anything to do with the Americans. I believe that Brown and Root will have a great contribution to make to the management of these dockyards.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Plymouth sub-region already has very severe economic and social problems, sadly comparable to those in any part of the United Kingdom? In view of this increased job loss, what efforts will his Department make to alleviate the position, in terms of job training and the attraction of alternative industry to the area? Does my hon. Friend not agree that his Department — not just the Departments of Employment and of Trade and Industry — has a responsibility, in view of the decision that has been taken this week?

Mr. Hamilton: I sympathise with my hon. Friend on that point. But the difficulty is that the work load in the Devonport dockyard is falling. Therefore, I do not think that it is the job of the Ministry of Defence to subsidise jobs in Plymouth. The fact is that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Trade and Industry are mainly concerned with Government support for the area. I believe, however, that the preferred contractor whom we have selected will provide the best possible opportunities for work to be brought into the dockyard.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Are we now to have Trident courtesy of the American Government, helicopters courtesy of Sikorsky, early warning aircraft courtesy of Boeing, and the refit of the majority of our naval frigates and submarines courtesy of Brown and Root of Delaware? Will the Minister tell us exactly how many jobs will be put at risk by subordinating the interests of national security to those of commercial gain? Will he not realise even at this late stage that the defences of this country should be under the control of this country?

Mr. Hamilton: I do not believe that the United States would feel that it is subordinating its national interests by accepting weapons systems from here. There is a two-way trade, and I welcome it.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): As one whose great great great grandfather was party to building the Plymouth-Devonport dockyard and as, therefore, I have an interest in it, may I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that the contract that his right hon. Friend has negotiated is a very tight one, giving the company the responsibility to find the money for redundancies and to ensure that there is not an excessive profit on non-competitive naval work? Will my hon. Friend also confirm that this contract, if it is completed, will provide, through the company, A much wider range of job opportunities, in that the company will have much wider world wide support, which will enable it to put contracts the dockyard's way?

Mr. Hamilton: That is absolutely true. The dockyards will be much more competitive if they become more efficient, because they will be able to get work from outside. I am convinced that Brown and Root has every opportunity to bring in such work. It is worth making the point that the combined savings of the two dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth will be about £320 million over 10 years.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Minister take cognisance of the point made by his hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) about the personnel who may be in control of this consortium? What information can he give the House about the dominant role that Brown and Root will play in the selection of top personnel? Will he ensure that these top personnel are United Kingdom citizens so that vital information is not leaked across the Atlantic to a company that is highly engaged in defence contracts, especially in the Houston area? Will he not confirm that, despite all the protestations of unions and others, the Government have rolled on in

[Mr. Dick Douglas]

their merry way with the idea of keeping to the vesting date of 1 April 1987 that they originally had in mind and that the whole process of consultation has been nothing but a farce?

Mr. Hamilton: The process of consultation has not been a farce. The unions have had six weeks in which to consult their members and that was on an extended timetable which the unions proposed. I understand that they have finished their consultations in Rosyth. It is unfortunate that they left their Devonport consultations until the last of these six weeks. Be that as it may, last week's weather may have made consultations more difficult. In the circumstances, we are prepared at today's meeting to consider Rosyth and the preferred contractor for it that we announced in December. We shall shortly issue a further paper on Devonport about the way negotiations have proceeded there and we shall invite the unions' views on that when they have considered that paper. I hope the House will agree that this is a sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): I regret that I cannot report to the House the occupation of my great great grandfather. There is a common view in Devon and Cornwall about the need for a good future for Devonport, but there is no common view that what my hon. Friend is doing is wrong. Many people feel that it is perfectly sensible for him to look into proposals of this kind, which offer a better guarantee for the introduction of new work to the dockyard.

Mr. Hamilton: That is really the significant point, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making it. If the Devonport dockyard remains in the ownership of the taxpayer as a Government-owned plc, there will be significant job losses—5,000 of them in Devonport. The deal that we have made with Brown and Root says that the job losses will be somewhat less and the company offers the opportunity of bringing in more work.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It would not be doing the Minister an injustice to suggest that he was a bit vague about the whole matter of foreign shareholdings. He said that it might be 29 per cent. and that that might not be acceptable, but that 31 per cent. might be all right. How do the Government know the exact foreign shareholding, given that there are nominee shareholders, which may make it difficult to know the percentage? Is not this all a bit of a farce?

Mr. Hamilton: It is not at all a farce. There is always difficulty about knowing precisely the number of shareholders in any company, but we will do our best to monitor that.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that the immoderate way in which American involvement is attacked by the Opposition will cause a great deal of fear to the many tens of thousands of people in Britain who derive their living from working for American companies or for companies with American involvement? Does he also agree that the 45 per cent. of the shares held by Barclays de Zoete Wedd would be available for take-up by British companies, including the local dockyard management consortium, and that that shows that the overwhelming influence will be national and not international or American?

Mr. Hamilton: I can certainly confirm that. The Barclays de Zoete Wedd holding is 45 per cent. and, with the agreement of the Government, some or indeed all of that may be made available to British companies and, I hope, employees as well.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will not the people of Plymouth be very angry tonight when they find out that not a single Member of Parliament from Plymouth is in the Chamber when D-day, D for Devonport, is being debated? When the Minister says that fewer jobs will be lost, will he give us a time-scale? The Minister said that the in-house offer was a loss of 5,000 jobs over seven years. Is it not possible that 4,000 jobs will go within two years under the proposals that the Government have accepted? Can we have a straight answer to that question?

Mr. Hamilton: The scale of job losses and what period they are spread over are confidential matters between the Government and the contractor. I am afraid that I am unable to answer for the people of Plymouth.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As I understand that NATO, which includes the United States, has kept the peace for the past 40 years or more, why is it that the knee-jerk reaction of the Opposition is one of rampant, paranoid, negative and spiteful hostility to the United States?

Mr. Hamilton: As my hon. Friend says, it is remarkable that we are keen to attract American investment into Britain, but when a good company comes in to take over the management of this dockyard, there is this extraordinary reaction, which will do nothing but damage to the prospects for jobs in this country.

Pilkington plc

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise out of questions?

Mr. Hind: No, Sir, it arises out of yesterday's business, and it is of some importance. Yesterday, in the debate on the north-south divide, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said:

"after Pilkingtons had been forced to take a number of decisions to protect itself against the merger, which are deeply damaging to the long-term interests of that company."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 768.]

What was suggested by the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There must be a point of order that I can answer. I am not responsible for what is said in debate in this place.

Mr. Hind: Pilkington's management has told me that no such——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have to find other ways of raising the matter. It is patently not a matter of order for me.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order arising out of questions, Mr. Speaker. Bearing in mind the point made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) about the lack of Members representing Plymouth in the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter of order, either.

Rent Control (New Lettings) Abolition

3.32 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Rent Acts to permit new lettings to be free of rent controls.

The Bill is designed to enable more people in Britain to be housed. One of the problems of housing in Britain is homelessness. Empty homes, whether in the public or private sectors, are a waste.

It has been said:

"Local authorities estimate—these are the only estimates we have—that in England 345,000 private sector homes were empty in April 1985. Nearly 100,000 of them were in London, where the problem of homelessness is greatest. Many of those homes, but not all — even some needing refurbishment—could be let to people who need them if landlords were not inhibited by the effects of the Rent Acts."—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. 381.]

Those are not my words, but the words of my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, who spoke so eloquently on 19 February 1986. How right he was. [*Laughter.*] Opposition Members may scoff at those words, but they were true then and, if they were true then, they are even more true today.

We all recognise that there is a problem of homelessness, and that over 500,000 homes are available in Britain. Surely there is little doubt, even among those blinkered Opposition Members, that if we seriously want to do something about the problem of homelessness, it is the Rent Acts which are standing in our way.

I acknowledge that there are people who benefit from the Rent Acts. Indeed, my Bill specifically excludes, by both its short and long titles, those people who benefit from the Rent Acts. But there can be little doubt that at present in Britain there is a demand for rented accommodation which is not being met because of the Rent Acts, which have been on the statute book for several decades.

Surely the time has now come for us to give the British people the right to rent. There are people in Britain who want to be tenants in council houses and they still have that right. There are many people who wanted the right to become home owners, and my hon. Friend and predecessors gave them that right. But there are still people in Britain who come to London for the first time to start their working career, as I did in the early 1970s: I must be typical of many hundreds of thousands of single people who, in their early twenties, leave the provinces for London and face the problem of a shortage of accommodation. They would be willing customers of the suppliers of private rented accommodation.

I recognise that one must go slowly in such matters, but, heaven knows, we have gone at a snail's pace in the past in addressing ourselves to this delicate problem. I also recognise that it would be unfair at this stage to include within the scope of my Bill those who are at the moment beneficiaries under the Rent Acts. But there is little doubt from the statistics of comparison available between Britain and other countries that Britain has a low level of supply of rented accommodation. In West Germany, 36 per cent. of households rent from private landlords; in France, the figure is 32 per cent., and in the United States it is 33 per cent. In Britain it is just 9 per cent. In those other countries, private renting is not the major political issue that it is in the United Kingdom.

[Mr. Michael Brown]

We must ask—the question is posed not by me but by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction in his excellent speech last year—why we in the United Kingdom seem to concentrate on just two types of tenure—home ownership or council tenancy. There must be an alternative middle way to supply accommodation for those people who wish to have the right to rent.

We know that more than 500,000 homes in Britain are empty. They must be empty because of the restrictions of current and previous legislation. I believe that there is a willingness on the part of the Government to address themselves to the problem of homelessness in a way that no other Government have done in the past.

It may be possible for the Bill to reach the statute book in the present session of Parliament. However, I recognise that that is a big step. If the Bill is given a fair passage this afternoon, it is more likely that it will be a spur to my hon. Friend and his colleagues to ensure that it is included as a firm commitment by the Government in the Conservative party's next election manifesto. The people in Britian who are homeless and looking for rented accommodation and who want to exercise that right to rent will be able to do so only with a Conservative Government.

If I am successful this afternoon, I would dearly wish my hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment to ensure that Government time is made available so that the Government's clear wish can come to pass before the next election. I recognise, eternal optimist though I am, that that might be difficult. I note that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is here and he might wish to make Government time available. But if, by chance, there is some difficulty, I urge my hon. Friends to pick up the Bill immediately they are re-elected after the next general election.

3.59 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) on raising this matter. He has done us a service by spotlighting what would certainly occur if, by some mischance, this Government were re-elected. I remind him that, when the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) was Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, he tried to persuade the Cabinet, of which he was not a member, to bring forward legislation along the lines advocated by the hon. Gentleman today. The hon. Member for Eastbourne was reported in the press as having been quite upset when the Cabinet told him that no action would be taken in that Parliament.

The Cabinet is no less keen and enthusiastic in wishing to see the decontrol of the privately rented sector than the hon. Members for Eastbourne and for Brigg and Cleethorpes. The Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues simply consider it unwise to take any action before the next election. That is why, unlike last Friday, the ministerial payroll will abstain today. Eighteen months ago, when I opposed a private ten-minute Bill, it was lost by one vote. I am sure that the ministerial payroll will abstain today and that I shall be proved right.

The present Housing Minister, as the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes said, has made the Government's position perfectly clear. In February last year, he said that there was little point in putting forward major legislation halfway through a Parliamentary term because of what he described as the destructive attitude which the Labour party was sure to take. If by "destructive attitude" he means that the Labour party would defend the right of private tenants to have protection on rents and security, we plead guilty. We are not ashamed of that.

Moreover, in his speech at the party conference on 7 October last year, the Minister made it clear that the Government, if re-elected, would remove controls and security of tenure from new lettings.

The Minister referred during that speech and on other occasions to "Socialist controls" in the privately rented sector. If they are "Socialist controls" why have they not been removed in nearly eight years of a Right-wing Conservative Administration? Why were these "Socialist controls" agreed to by the Conservatives when the Labour party was in office? The Conservatives made it clear that they would not oppose the Rent Acts being restored?

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes was right in one respect—there is an acute housing crisis, but deregulating the privately rented sector would make it far worse. The Conservatives use the same argument that was used when the Rent Act 1957 was going through. In 1956 the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), when he was a junior housing Minister said that deregulation would provide more tenancies and more flexibility. The same argument is used today by the housing Minister, other Ministers and the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes today.

In June 1956, before the 1957 Act came on the Statute Book, there were 6·5 million private dwellings. In 1961, after four years of the Act, there were 5 million. Where were the further dwellings?

The truth is that, once the places became vacant, many of the owners simply sold them off. Therefore, the Act which provided for decontrol led not to more but to substantially less rented accommodation. The Rent Act 1957 led to something else. It led to great homelessness, misery and injustice for many many private tenants and to Rachmanism. It led to the terror that existed in parts of London and other places, where Rachman and his agents were even willing to use Alsation dogs to force tenants out.

When the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes says that existing tenants will be protected, I say that, if deregulation came along, there would be great harassment and intimidation of sitting tenants, in order to get them out so that the places would become decontrolled and the landlord could let those places without any limits on rent and without any security. Hundreds of thousands of existing private tenants would be greatly at risk if this Government were re-elected and they introduced another Act like the 1957 Act. I say to the Labour Front Bench and to the Labour party nationally that we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that, during the election campaign, we warn private tenants what is likely to happen if the Tories win.

Many, many people are desperately in need of accommodation, but they will not find that accommodation at a reasonable rent in any deregulated private sector. That is why it is so necessary for local authorities to start building once again. This year, there will probably be even fewer than 30,000 new dwellings built by local authorities and housing associations. So many of our people are

desperately in need of housing. They want rented housing, but they will get adequate rented housing at a reasonable rent and with protection only from the public sector.

I call on my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose this Bill, to ensure that, even in this Tory-dominated House of Commons, private tenants will continue to have that protection.

Mr. Speaker: The question is that the hon. Member——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must put the Question.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 144.

Division No. 62] **[4.06 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Corrie, John
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Galley, Roy
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gower, Sir Raymond
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McQuarrie, Albert
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Sir Carol
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shersby, Michael
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Allan Stewart.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*

Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*	Wigley, Dafydd
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*	Williams, Rt Hon A.
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*	Winnick, David
Wainwright, R.	Woodall, Alec
Wallace, James	
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*	Tellers for the Noes:
Wareing, Robert	Mr. Terry Lewis and
Welsh, Michael	Mr. David Clelland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

COMMITTEE *[Progress 19 January]*

[MR. ERNEST ARMSTRONG *in the Chair*]

4.17 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong. I seek your help and guidance on a point of order which is somewhat complex and crucial to the future consideration of the Bill. I gave you prior notice of my intention to raise this point of order, Mr. Armstrong, as I did to the Office of the Secretary of State for the Environment. I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman is in his place on the Treasury Bench.

There remains a major difference of opinion about the legal implications of powers in the Bill. The Secretary of State has courteously advised my hon. Friends and myself, both publicly and privately, that our interpretations of the Bill were wrong in law, and we thought it appropriate, therefore, to seek counsel's opinion. That we have done. We have sought two independent opinions on the implications of the powers that the Secretary of State is asking the House of Commons to grant him under the Bill.

Clause 4(6) provides that subsection (1)

"shall have effect notwithstanding any decision of a court (whether before or after the passing of this Act) purporting to have a contrary effect."

Subsection (1) provides:

"Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act for the purposes of the relevant provisions in relation to any of the initial years or intermediate years shall be deemed to have been done in compliance with those provisions."

The definition of the relevant provisions is to be found in clause 4(2) of the Bill:

"Part VI of the 1980 Act, section 8 of and Schedule 2 to the Local Government Finance Act 1982, sections 2 and 3 of the Education Act 1986 and section 2 of the Rate Support Grants Act 1986."

Our advice is that four other statutes are affected and:

"Accordingly, anything done by the Secretary of State before enactment for the purposes of these provisions is deemed to be done in compliance with their requirements. There is nothing limiting the deeming provision to errors arising out of the erroneous definition, and therefore calculation of relevant and total expenditure."

We believed that the provisions of the Bill went much wider than that from the outset and the opinion we have received confirms that:

"The present wording appears quite clearly to cover any procedural impropriety, failure to consider a matter rationally, or other unlawfulness in respect of anything done by the Secretary of State for those statutory purposes."

During the discussions on 19 January the Secretary of State explained his view as follows:

"It depends on the subject of the litigation. If it has to do with total expenditure or involves the definition of total expenditure, the Act will prevail over any decision of the court." — [*Official Report*, 19 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 643.]

He went on at some length to support that view.

It is our view, and that view has been confirmed by counsel's opinion, that that statement is based on a misinterpretation of the clause as it stands. To be

consistent with the Secretary of State's statement a substantial amendment to the Bill would be required, relating the deeming provisions solely to calculation of total and relevant expenditure otherwise reasonably made under the previous understanding of those terms.

A similar point arises in clause 6(2) which states:

"Anything done by the Secretary of State before the passing of this Act for the purposes of Part I of the 1984 Act in relation to the financial year beginning in 1985 or that beginning in 1986 shall be deemed to have been done in compliance with the provisions of that Part."

Our legal advisers state:

"This is not restricted to issues arising from total and relevant expenditure, but once more covers other procedural impropriety, irrationality and illegality. By sub-clause (3) any designation of an authority is deemed to have been made in compliance with Part I, even if otherwise unlawfully made, including unlawfulness in no way connected with errors arising from the interpretation of total and relevant expenditure."

I am setting this out in some length and I apologise but this is a complicated matter. We consider it is impossible to continue discussion on a reasonable, rational or coherent basis unless the Secretary of State's — *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State laughs, but we are in this position today only because of the incompetence of the Secretary of State and his predecessors concerning such matters. Shortly we shall come back to discuss the continuing incompetence over which the Secretary of State is presiding.

It is important to have a full explanation of the retrospective and respective provisions. We have taken this matter very seriously and I seek your help, Mr. Armstrong, concerning the future proceedings of the Committee. We consider that the Committee should not proceed to a final consideration and vote on clause 1 until it has had an opportunity to hear from the Attorney-General about these matters. With regard to discussions of clause 4 and clause 6 of the Bill, it would be appropriate for the Attorney to be in attendance throughout the Committee's considerations. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is not bothering to listen to what we have to say.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong——

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Armstrong): Order. I cannot have a point of order on a point of order.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to you, Mr. Armstrong. Apart from a lack of normal relations between the Secretary of State and the Labour party, the Secretary of State is apparently unwilling to listen to serious arguments about the Bill.

The Secretary of State's remarks in respect of the Greenwich case which is again due to come before the courts——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Committee has already discussed the judicial review. We shall come to clause 4 and clause 6 in due course. The hon. Gentleman may raise those matters at that time, but up to now I have not been aware of any point of order for me.

Dr. Cunningham: I said at the beginning that this is a complicated matter and I do not apologise for seeking to get it right. It is crucial to the whole discussion of the Bill. My point of order is first to seek your guidance, Mr. Armstrong, and to safeguard the Committee's rights in this matter.

Is it appropriate that we should proceed with consideration of those matters without clarification and is it not in the interests of the Committee that the Attorney should be present to give his view on them? The Secretary of State's remarks and his interpretations made during debate on a previous group of amendments is at issue. I seek your help and guidance.

The First Deputy Chairman: The interpretations made by the Secretary of State are, of course, matters for debate. The presence of the Attorney or any other Government Minister is not a matter for the Chair. I have no jurisdiction over that.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): On a further point of order, Mr. Armstrong. It appears to us that the purpose of this unique and unprecedented Bill is to validate decisions of the Secretary of State that were deemed illegal by the Attorney-General. The Secretary of State's interpretation of the Bill, in trying to validate his previous illegal action, is wrong. If this legislation becomes an Act, the House of Commons, and indeed the Government, will end up with exactly the same position that we are now trying to correct. My point of order is that the Attorney-General is not just a Government Minister who advises the Government in his official and legal capacity. He also advises the House. It is in order to move, on a point of order, that the Attorney-General should come before a Committee. That has been done in other Committees—not in a meeting of the full House in Committee. It has been moved, on a point of order, that the Attorney-General be required to come to a Committee to give advice. That is what we are seeking today. If that does not happen and we proceed we may finish up in a very difficult situation. We are already trying to put a difficult situation right through this legislation.

It seems to me that the Secretary of State continually makes illegal actions and mistakes. He cooks the books and asks——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman ought to know that, however important the issue may be, the presence of the Attorney-General is not a matter for me. The hon. Gentleman can request, and he has made his request, but he cannot move that the Attorney-General be present. Quite frankly, he has not raised a point of order with me.

4.30 pm

Mr. Ridley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Armstrong. I hope that you will be able to protect the Committee from dubious and spurious arguments, based on unnamed legal advice on a point to be raised on a later clause, being trumped up as a spurious and bogus point of order by the hon. Gentleman. We have a lot of work to do and I should like to make progress with the real business of the Committee. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has been wasting the time of the Committee raising matters of substance under a point of order. I hope that you will be able to protect the Committee so that orderly progress can be made.

Mr. Allan Williams (Swansea, West) *rose*——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I listen to all hon. Members who wish to raise a point of order. I am bound

[The First Deputy Chairman]

to say that no point has been raised that is a matter for me. The matters raised are for debate and will come up at the appropriate time.

Dr. Cunningham: Further to the Secretary of State's point of order, Mr. Armstrong, which he thinks is a genuine point of order. As he has challenged apparently the bona fides of what I was saying, may I point out that the opinion was provided by Mr. Roger Henderson QC?

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman has raised the matter and I accept that. Even so, it is a matter for debate and not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Williams: Further to the point of order, Mr. Armstrong. The important point for hon. Members is that during the debate we have to determine whether we will give the Secretary of State a certain range of powers. In determining whether to give him those powers, the judgment of the Committee will be influenced by whether those powers are being given purely in relation to the future or whether they are also being given retrospectively. We cannot continue with a meaningful debate on the range of powers until we have had legal clarification as to precisely what it is that we are giving the Secretary of State. It is from that point of view that my hon. Friend has said that we need clarification from the Attorney-General as to precisely which range of powers is covered by the retrospective clearance.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish) *rose*——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Let me reply to the point of order. The right hon. Gentleman has raised a matter which is a matter for debate. If the right hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member is not satisfied with the explanation from the Front Bench, he has the opportunity to debate and to vote against it, but it is not a matter for me.

Mr. Bennett: Further to that point of order, Mr. Armstrong. I appreciate the point that you have just made, but may I put it to you that your duty in the Chair is to try to ensure the orderly consideration of the Bill. As an Opposition, the only way in which we can press the Government for information is by the threat to delay proceedings. I am sure you are aware that regularly in Committee the Opposition have to mount delaying tactics so as to press the Government to make a statement. If we want to make good progress, it would be helpful if the Government would tell us that, when we get to the two clauses where the extraordinary powers for judges are to be debated, they will arrange for the Attorney-General to make a statement. If we are told at this stage that the Attorney-General will be here to make a statement and will confirm either that the legal advice that we have received is correct or that the interpretation of the Secretary of State is correct, it would be possible for us to make fairly rapid progress. But if the Government are not prepared to give that undertaking, the traditional response for the Opposition is to delay and to do everything they can to press the Government to produce a statement.

I should have thought that you, Mr. Armstrong, were in a position at least to give the Government the opportunity to facilitate progress by finding out whether they wish to say that the Attorney-General will be here to make a statement on the legal implications of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) a few moments ago.

The First Deputy Chairman: I am sure that no hon. Member needs permission from me to make his position clear. It is a matter for the Government whether a statement is made. Fortunately, it is not my job, but anyway I do not need to advise the hon. Gentleman about delaying tactics.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong. Is it not right that the Government seek your protection in this regard, and that now is the opportunity for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to put right something that the Opposition have ignored for the last four or five years and to bring the rate support grant that is due shortly into line with the law? Further to that, is it not right that if the hon. Gentleman is demanding the presence in the Committee of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General at least he should have the shadow Attorney-General with him on the Front Bench?

The First Deputy Chairman: As the hon. Gentleman knows, these are not matters for me. We ought to proceed.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong. Can you advise me whether there is a parliamentary precedent whereby a Standing Committee has moved a motion, debated it and voted to request a Government Minister to attend the Committee to give advice? I should like to know whether there is any precedent which would enable us to move a motion, to vote on it and, if we succeeded in getting sufficient votes, to request a Minister or an Officer of the House to come and advise us.

The First Deputy Chairman: All Members of the House are members of the Committee and are entitled to come. Fortunately or unfortunately, I cannot command either their presence or their absence. The matters which have been raised are very important but they are matters for debate and not matters for the Chair. I think we should proceed.

Clause 1

RATE FUND REVENUE ACCOUNTS

Dr. Cunningham: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 2, line 26, at end insert—

'(6A) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament an annual report on any specification made in respect of subsection (6) above.'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 20, in page 2, line 26, at end insert—

'(6A) Specifications made under subsection (6) above must be contained in an Order under this Act which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 21, in page 2, line 26, at end insert—

'(6A) Specifications made under subsection (6) above must be contained in an Order under this Act and no Order under this subsection may be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

No. 48, in clause 2, page 3, line 14, at end insert

'provided only that any such specification shall require an affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament.'.

No. 51, in page 3, line 14, at end insert

'Specifications made under this subsection must be contained in an Order under this Act, and no Order under this subsection may be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

No. 52, in page 3, line 14, at end insert

'Specifications made under this subsection must be contained in an Order under this Act which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 71, in clause 3, page 4, line 14, at end insert—

'(7A) Specifications made under subsection (7) above must be contained in an Order under this Act which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 72, in page 4, line 14, at end insert:

'(7A) Specifications made under subsection (7) above must be contained in an Order under this Act and no Order under this subsection may be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

No. 154, in clause 9, page 7, line 44, at end add—

'(7) The power may only be exercised provided that there shall have been an affirmative resolution of both Houses.'.

Dr. Cunningham: There remains, as we have just been demonstrating, considerable concern about the power of the Secretary of State in respect of the Bill. One concern is about the power of the Secretary of State to make specifications regarding local authority accounting practices for the purposes of clause 1. Amendment No. 19 makes the minimal requirement that, once specifications have been made in a given year, the Secretary of State should lay an annual report before Parliament setting out the details. That is not only a reasonable but a sensible requirement. It would give Parliament the opportunity to consider and review what had happened.

It would also provide a means for Parliament at least to be informed of the implementation of subsection (6) in practice. It would also provide an opportunity for local government accountants to examine the Government's intentions in the exercise of proper professionalism, which we presume this is all about. The accountants would no doubt want to ensure the Government's interventions were met with the most appropriate and uniform response in accordance with accountancy practice. As the Government talk about good and proper practices, presumably they intend also to try to seek uniformity. It is, I understand, at least in part the Government's case that lack of uniformity is one thing that they want to bring to an end.

Amendments Nos. 20 and 21 call for any specification made under subsection (6) in respect of local authority accounting to be made the subject of an order. Amendment No. 20 provides for a negative order and amendment No. 21 for an affirmative order subject to approval by both Houses. The alternative proposals spring in part from the difficulty of trying to find out the Government's intention and, therefore, the likely importance of any specifications to be made. The Government's attitude is obscure, to say the least. Some of the specifications are likely to be of considerable significance to local authority accounting practice and to the financial circumstances of the authorities concerned.

Other specifications may be trivial, but at least in the case of more important ones it is important to have some safeguards to allow for parliamentary scrutiny. If no such scrutiny is provided for, it seems clear that the Secretary of State could make changes which have a substantial impact on an authority in the forthcoming financial year without there being any recourse to Parliament. That seems unfair and a significant departure from previous practice.

The power to specify extends to naming additional accounts against which expenditure or income is to be disregarded for purposes of calculating block grant, and possibly even wider purposes. From the point of view of authorities that are under financial pressure, the power in respect of income definitions in particular could have major implications. If our guesswork is right, it is incumbent on the Minister for Local Government to be candid with the House and say what the implications are.

Other amendments, which we would have liked to have been selected, deal with related matters. Amendments Nos. 50 and 51 would require the affirmative and the negative resolution procedure respectively for orders. Amendment No. 50 would preserve the opportunity of Ministers to make specifications, but require a local authority to have regard to any specification only when determining what to count against its rate fund revenue account.

Amendments Nos. 71 and 72 would limit the power of the Secretary of State to specify adjustments upwards or downwards to calculations of authorities' total expenditure in any year from 1987-88. The power is a further example of the way in which the Bill goes beyond the simple technical requirement to clarify the law. Amendments Nos. 71 and 72 would require the making of a negative and affirmative order respectively before any such specification could be effective. They seek the kind of safeguards that I spoke of a little while ago.

I have been brief because, in spite of what the Secretary of State said earlier, it is not any part of our purpose to talk just for the sake of it or unnecessarily to delay the Bill. I hope that I have said enough to allow the Minister to take more time to reply in detail to our fears.

4.45 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 48 and 154. I agree with the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I am not anxious to delay the Committee unduly.

Mr. Tony Banks : Drag it out.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The hon. Member can speak for himself.

Much of what we are discussing goes beyond simply rectifying the law. The Government are trying to take powers to determine what should go in what accounts. If the Government want to force through more centralising powers over local government, those powers must lie as far as possible with Parliament rather than with the Government or, still worse, the Secretary of State.

The alliance amendments are like those proposed by the hon. Member for Copeland. We say in amendment No. 48 that the items that the Government believe should be put in or deleted from a local authority rate fund revenue account should be considered by the House on the affirmative resolution procedure. We have proposed the same, with miscellaneous specifications, under clause 9.

The House should retain those powers because of the distinction that we would make between accounting techniques or systems employed by local authorities that are legitimate or illegitimate. It is perfectly legitimate for

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

a local authority to do things which it believes are genuinely acceptable in terms of its fiduciary powers and which are what the Government of the day wish to do, and not to rely on a change of Government retrospectively to put money into its funds again.

A local authority which says that, bearing in mind its understanding of existing Government policy towards local government, it should be able to sort out its accounts to the best advantage of people in its area and pursue what it understands to be Government policy, is acting legitimately. If, however, it decides to do various things with its account in the hope that, before it goes bankrupt, a new Government will be returned and retrospectively put money back into the account, it is acting illegitimately.

It is important that Parliament should retain its powers of scrutiny and not allow a Government to overrule one course of action and allow the other. If we are to have such centralising powers, Parliament must have powers of scrutiny. I do not want to scrutinise such matters, but that is better than leaving it to the Government.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I hope that amendments Nos. 20 and 21 are carried. In this group of amendments, we have given the Government a choice between them and a more moderate line. Amendment No. 19 is a much more modest version, and the Government should be prepared to accept it if they are at all reasonable.

I am anxious that we are increasingly taking powers from local government and limiting the powers of Members of Parliament to be aware of what the Secretary of State decides. The present Secretary of State is fond of introducing legislation which gives him powers. He did that with the Transport Act 1985. Here, in clause 1(6)*(b)*, the right hon. Gentleman is empowering himself to change what is not concluded in schedule 1.

One can assume that, if the accounts already exist and the Government wish to specify them at some future date, they will be included in schedule 1. We have the right to debate schedule 1 and to decide whether we agree with what is included in it. Clause 1(6)*(b)* gives the Secretary of State power at any future date to add without reference to the House items of which he may now be aware. If he wishes he could name them at this stage.

I recognise that, because of the haste with which the Bill has had to be prepared and the wide diversity of local government, the Secretary of State may not be aware of everything that should be taken into account. Of course, circumstances change. A future Secretary of State, whether Conservative or Labour, may consider that certain matters should be included in the provision and may want to add to the list of items already included in schedule 1. Our principal point of difference concerns the way in which that is to be done, if we accept that it might be necessary.

My hon. Friends and I believe that it is totally wrong that the Secretary of State, without any reference to the House, may change a specified account and thereby change the way in which local authorities can administer their services and meet the needs of their communities. Government Members must remember that it may not be long before my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is the Secretary of State. If the Bill as it stands is passed, he may wish to take some action without reference to the House.

The amendments have been tabled in a reasonable manner. It is right that we should include those provisions. If amendments Nos. 20 and 21 are not agreed, amendment No. 19 is the absolute minimum that the Government should be prepared to accept. If Conservative Back Benchers respect their positions as hon. Members, if they believe that there is any point in being Members of Parliament and do not wish power to be continually eroded and given to Secretaries of State who will not have to answer for their decisions — this clause will give increased power to a Secretary of State — they should join Labour Members in the Division Lobby and vote for one or other of the amendments.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall make basically the same point as was made by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) who considered that Parliament should be concerned about legitimacy. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) properly spoke about the need for Parliament to have an adequate opportunity to press important matters. This week, I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Employment — the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier)—which led me to make my brief contribution in support of amendments Nos. 19 to 21. Parliament must have an opportunity to challenge not only illegitimate but unreasonable Government actions. One of my constituents, who is developing a small business, wrote to me about problems that he encounters. He made a passing reference to rates. The Minister's reply, in part, states:

> "The whole issue of business rates is of major concern to the Government and it is a matter which has to be tackled at the roots by encouraging value for money and discouraging excessive spending by individual authorities. The Government have already introduced a number of measures to ease the rates burden on business."

The Under-Secretary's letter contains not one word about the fact that businesses must bear a £6 billion burden because of the Government's action in reducing central support and forcing local authorities to increase rates. Parliament will be put in a bad position if it is denied an opportunity to challenge the irresponsible and unreasonable comments by Ministers who write letters such as this to my constituents and disregard the truth, the reality and the record. The Minister must understand that the House of Commons needs an opportunity to challenge illegitimate and unreasonable Government actions.

I am not a lawyer and I do not have the expertise to determine which Government actions are illegitimate. But, as an ordinary citizen and an experienced Member of Parliament, I can say with absolute confidence that the Government's actions are entirely unreasonable and that Parliament will greatly be at fault if it does not take sufficient power to challenge irresponsible and unreasonable attitudes.

Mr. Tony Banks: During the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) I intervened to the effect that I certainly wished to drag out the debate on the Bill for as long as I possibly could. I part company, perhaps, with my hon. Friends on the Front Bench in that respect. By nature, I am far more of a kamikaze Member of the House. I shall be quite clear about this matter. As long as I stay within order, if I can inflict some damage on the Government, if only by the boring nature of my speeches—if that is the only recourse that I have—that is what I shall do. Therefore, I make no apologies.

Provided I always stay within order—I know that you, Mr. Armstrong, will guide me in this respect—I may delay the Committee to exact some form of retribution on the Government. Two hon. Members, who are not here at the moment but are standing by, fully armed and ready to rush in at a moment's notice—my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—and I are so outraged at what the Government are doing to our borough that we shall do anything we can to deny the Government this legislation and to deny Conservative Members their sleep or dinners, always, of course, staying within order.

It has been said that amendment No. 19 is the minimum requirement. All that we ask of the Secretary of State is that he brings a report to Parliament giving details of what changes have been made in local authority accounting practices for the purposes of clause 1. That is a perfectly reasonable demand. Amendments Nos. 20 and 21 go slightly further, but in the same direction. They call for any specification made under section 1(6) in respect of local authority accounting to be made the subject of an order. Amendment No. 20 will provide for a negative order and amendment No. 21 will provide for one subject to the affirmative procedure, requiring approval by both Houses. With two forms of order, one can choose that which is most suited to the provision being introduced by the Government. That merely underlines how reasonable and flexible we are, and we invite the Government to join us.

Ministers cannot have it both ways. If Ministers insist on interfering in the day-to-day affairs of town halls and county halls, and insist on dragging unwilling Members of Parliament into the affairs of local authorities, making this the place in which decisions that previously were taken by democratically elected local councillors are now taken, we should have the right to interrogate them and to ask for reports from them in much the way that local councils do in respect of their leaders, chairs of committee and chief officers. If we are to turn this place into a mega town hall, we might as well import many of the practices followed in town halls and county halls. I do not welcome that development. It is deplorable that a local authority's decision-making responsibilities are constantly reduced by a Government who have repeatedly said since 1979 that they intend to take Whitehall off the backs of town halls.

5 pm

The effect of all the local government Bills since 1979 has been contrary to the Prime Minister's stated intention in 1979. Parliament is interfering in and deciding matters that used to be the day-to-day concern of democratically elected local councillors. That is to the disadvantage of local authorities and Parliament. Hon. Members are not really interested in getting so close to the detailed financial provisions of local authorities. In this part of the Bill we can see just how detailed we are becoming in our consideration of local authority matters. I can prove the point that Parliament—meaning its Members—is not happy about these activities by once again pointing at the deserted Conservative Benches. Conservative Members are simply not interested. We realise that these proposals are neither of interest nor of close concern to Conservative Members.

In these amendments we are saying that, if the Secretary of State insists that Parliament should take over many of the responsibilities now exercised by local government, Parliament must have the right to examine all the Government's proposals in detail. I have pointed out more than once—I suspect that, if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr Armstrong, during the many hours that we shall no doubt consider the Bill, I shall do it again—that, if we are to interfere in the affairs of local authorities, we must have the power to ensure that we exercise those functions in the best possible and most efficient manner.

These amendments are reasonable. I am surprised that the Government are resisting them so strongly. I shall wait to hear the Minister and perhaps, if I can catch your eye, Mr. Armstrong, I may even speak again on this clause.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I support amendments Nos. 19, 20 and 21. The Committee will be aware that the vagaries of local government finance have been well known for many years to Secretaries of State of more than one party. Indeed, the black box of the rate support grant system is such that I understand that at least one former Secretary of State held his head in his hands waiting for the result of the programme which showed the various weightings, allocations, cross-references of individual items, and so on.

This is a very complex business. It is hardly surprising that many people in our constituencies do not understand the vagaries of the rate support grant system or why they are being shot in the hip on the housing investment programme, and cannot follow all the arguments in detail. If there is anyone who should be following all the arguments in detail, it is the Secretary of State responsible for those matters. It is incumbent on him to make apparent and transparent to the House of Commons precisely what kind of expenditure and what kind of criteria are involved.

A major parliamentary principle is involved in these issues, and it concerns retrospective legislation. In the past, hon. Members have taken extra-parliamentary action to oppose the principle of retrospective legislation. It is crucial that the Secretary of State should be accountable in the manner recommended by amendment No. 19, which states:

"The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament an annual report on any specification made in respect of subsection (6) above."

Why is the Secretary of State not prepared to make an annual report? Is it the simple fact that he has got it wrong so often that he does not have the self-confidence to work out the figures accurately, even once a year, and present and defend them in the House of Commons? What are the rights of the House in relation to the scrutiny of public expenditure if it cannot get a statement from the Secretary of State concerned? This legislation combines with the measures that the Government have taken in depriving some 11 million people of the vote in the metropolitan authorities and in abolishing the metropolitan authorities. It takes further powers from the House, just as the Government have abolished the powers of elected government in metropolitan counties and the right of people through their elected representatives to see what is happening.

Mr. Tony Banks: I should like to correct my hon. Friend in one respect. The number of people who lost the vote through the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils was not 11 million but 18 million. I am sure that my hon. Friend would want to be corrected.

Mr. Holland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that figure.

As for accounting procedures, the Government have maintained repeatedly from the Front Bench, with vociferous support from their Back Benches—fuller than they are today—that they wish commercial practices to be introduced into local authority finance; that they wish to see entrepreneurship flourish and would like to see the same in local authorities. The Government have claimed — one Conservative Back Bencher did so during Monday's debate — that local authorities are in some sense bureaucratic and hamstrung and cannot respond with initiative to problems as they arise. As it happens, last week several of the London boroughs responded to the very cold weather that we were facing in London. In Lambeth, meals on wheels were increased to more than 15,000 a day, emergency heating repairs were carried out —250 in one day—and provision was made for assisting the elderly who were faced with a crisis.

How will a local authority — whether Lambeth or Camden or one in Liverpool or any other part of the country — be able to be confident that it can fulfil its obligations to those in need during such a period under the emergency powers which at present in principle obtain to it if the Secretary of State rules retrospectively that these powers are out of order? What will the liability be, for example, in relation to surcharging? It is bad enough that councillors have to face the prospect of surcharging when Ministers certainly do not. For example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has got his sums wrong by several thousand million pounds a year in every medium-term financial forecast. Perhaps it would be a good idea if he were personally liable for that surcharging.

It is intolerable that not only should elected councillors face the risk of surcharging for defending the interests of those who elected them, or even for fulfilling their statutory obligations, but that it should be open to the Secretary of State to revise the basis of what is or is not legitimate expenditure, and to do so without bringing the matter before the House of Commons.

The Government laud certain kinds of commercial practice. There has recently been a spate of takeover bids in the City of London. Many of the companies involved, such as BTR, are classic conglomerates. Their aim is to enlarge their sphere of profit rather than the sphere of public service. But they take over the headquarters of a building and then sell it off or lease it out or lease it back in much the same manner as has been done with certain town halls where local authorities are seeking to be able to match appropriate income to appropriate expenditure.

That is highly relevant to the matters that are before us, in as much as the circumstances of individual local authorities differ so much. We know very well that very few inner-city constituencies are represented by Conservative Members, very few Conservative Members do more than, for example, live in an inner-city constituency within easy reach of this House. Many of them pride themselves on the fact that they live in the borough of Lambeth, thinking that they somehow have expertise in the problems of that borough.

Mr. Heddle: Where does the hon. Gentleman live?

Mr. Holland: Let me identify the sort of problems that are relevant to the amendments.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not know whether my hon. Friend heard the comment that has just been made by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle). I suggest that my hon. Friend asks that hon. Gentleman, who just wanders in and out as if this was a buffet meal rather than the House of Commons, to repeat the remark that he made. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire asked my hon. friend what bourgeois suburb of London he lives in. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to tell him.

Mr. Holland: Perhaps the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) would care to get to his feet on that matter. I do not happen to live in a bourgeois suburb. I live in my constituency. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman lives.

The reality is that many Conservative Members have walked into the debate as did the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on Monday, who got to this feet and started to talk about the Soviet borough of Lambeth, saying, apparently supporting his knowledge of the matter, that he lives there. It is not enough simply to live in a constituency to understand what its problems are.

In the London borough of Lambeth, for example, over half of the council housing is pre-1919. Now what does that mean in terms of the renewal expenditure undertaken by the council? It means not only that the expenditure per flat for modernisation is higher than other expenditure figures but quite simply that there comes a critical time in the life of housing stock when one cannot remedy a problem by replacing slates on the roof, or clearing the drains; one actually needs new roofs, new heating systems and new drains.

Therefore, there are indivisibilities in the expenditure that individual councils face. If they are to be able to fulfil their obligations to maintain a decent stock of housing, they will incur more expenditure when housing in that stock has come to the end of its natural life than those councils in other boroughs which have hardly any multi-storey tenancies and where there is detached council housing. In that respect, it is really quite wrong for Ministers to set down general guidelines without reference to the special needs that are accounted for and represented by that particular character of housing stock.

The argument that, in principle, rate support grant takes account of that is simply not supported by the overall figures that come out of the black box in the Department. I see that an official is quite desperate to get a message to the Minister. Perhaps the Minister is interested in replying on that, or perhaps he is not. It would be very interesting if he was to get his briefing on it, since clearly he does not know how to reply on the matter himself.

The reality is that, for example, in the London borough of Lambeth, with very special housing needs because of the age of the housing stock, the actual cuts that have occurred in the rate support grant system since 1979 have been well in excess of a single year's total annual revenue, including rate support grant systems.

5.15 pm

I put it to the Minister: what private company—if one wants to apply commercial criteria to the funding of local authorities—could possibly survive if it were to be deprived over five, six or seven years of resources and investment resources equivalent to a year's total income? No such company would be able to do that. Many companies in recent years have been offsetting the relative

squeeze on their profits by resorting to techniques such as creative accounting. They are able to get away with creative accounting without being challenged by Ministers, so why are councils challenged on their use of accounting to meet the expenditure needs which they must incur to fulfil their obligations?

By steamrollering the procedures of the House and by not being prepared to come forward with either an annual statement or a statutory instrument, affirmative or negative, the Government will be depriving the House of the right to debate these issues. However, there are also the social services obligations on local government. I will certainly admit that one thing is wrong in the borough of Lambeth—overcrowding. There is overcrowding in the borough and I not only admit but advertise to the House that the London borough of Lambeth is in breach of statutory obligations. It has a statutory obligation to ensure that teenage children of both sexes do not share the same bedroom. But it does not have the alternaive housing into which to put the children concerned.

The Government have compounded the problems with which we are faced by the abolition of the strategic housing role of the GLC. When I became the Member for my constituency we used to move between 1,500 and 2,000 families a year out of Lambeth. The door was slammed on that by what people now regard, quite rightly, as the farce of inter-borough nominations. The Government's population projections were for a falling inner-city population, but since the abolition of the GLC, which permitted that falling inner-city population, the demand for housing has been rising. Over the past few years, between 6,000 and 8,000 additional persons have been put on our books in Lambeth who otherwise would have been able to gain alternative housing outside the London borough of Lambeth and who therefore would not have been a claim on its charges.

In relation to the rate support grant system, how are we going to be able to raise such issues, of what is or is not a due expenditure by a local authority, if the Minister is not going to enable us, as provided in amendments Nos. 19, 20 and 21, to lay before Parliament an annual report or to ensure that the expenditure rules by which local authorities may spend their money are brought before this House?

Mr. Heddle: We have already heard that the hon. Gentleman lives in his constituency and has an intimate knowledge of his constituency. No doubt an examination of "Who's Who" and "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" will show whether he gives his address as the House of Commons, or as an address in his constituency, or the address where he resides at the weekend.

Because of the comprehensive knowledge that the hon. Gentleman has of his constituency, perhaps he would now tell the Committee how many houses in his constituency —he mentioned overcrowding in his constituency—have been vacant for three months in the London borough of Lambeth and how many have been vacant for six, nine or 12 months. Will the hon. Gentleman now admit to the Committee that over 1,378 houses in his constituency have been vacant for more than 12 months?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have allowed the intervention because the hon. Gentleman was talking about overcrowding and so on, but we are getting away from the amendments, which concern parliamentary control.

Mr. Holland: I think I am grateful to you, Mr. Armstrong, for allowing an intervention and then deeming that it may be out of order.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not want to spoil my hon. Friend's flow, but would he be interested to know that the intervention that he has just had to suffer was based not upon the intimate knowledge of Lambeth of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), but on information from civil servants, via the Front Bench, via the gofer to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire?

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not at all relevant to anything that we are discussing.

Mr. Holland: What surprises me about the intervention of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) is that for some reason he actually suggested that I do not live in my constituency. He then claimed that the proof of whether I live in my constituency is not whether I am actually there, whether I pay any rates, or whether any of my constituents know that I am there, but whether it is published in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" or in "Who's Who", the very mirror of "Spitting Image", the one entry which hon. Members — some of them admiring their own images so much — write for themselves. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has pinned his "Who's Who" entry to his shaving mirror. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I do live there. I am proud to live there and I enjoy living there. I do not know whether it is listed in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" and I do not give a damn, because I do not spend all my time reading my own entries in "Who's Who" or Dod's.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was relevant and I am grateful to him for raising it. The reality is that Lambeth's record on lettings for an inner-city borough with a housing stock of the character I have described is no worse than any other pressured inner-city borough. We know what the Tory party is up to. We know that there is a target list of boroughs. We know the sort of sophisticated, scalpel-like and incisive parliamentary language Conservative Members use such as, "loony Labour borough lock-outs." If they can rise above that gutter language and address the issues, they will address the points that I have made.

When over half of one's public housing stock dates from the first world war, it is extremely difficult to pursue the necessary modernisation programmes. There is a great deal of housing stock in Lambeth that has not been re-let because the resources have been taken away by the cuts in the housing investment programme, so that the houses cannot be brought up to a decent standard. That is item one. The second item relates precisely to the point I made on the abolition of the strategic housing role of the GLC. If one takes away mobility and cannot take the pressure off inner-city boroughs, one does not have the mobility necessary to reallocate the appropriate housing. For example——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman gives his example, I must say that I am trying hard to relate what he is saying to the amendments before the Committee. He must direct his remarks to the amendments.

Mr. Holland: It would be useful to have an assurance from the Minister that what I am saying will not be

[Mr. Holland]

relevant to the part of the Bill we are discussing and that it will be possible for any hon. Member to raise those issues on the Floor of the House regardless of what the Government deem to be an appropriate specification.

Mr. Straw: Does my hon. Friend agree that clauses 1(6)*(b)*, 2(4), 3(7), 3(8) and 9 give wide powers of specification in relation to the accounts of local authorities? For example, under clauses 3(7) and 3(8) the Secretary of State has powers to specify additions or subtractions from relevant expenditure. As the Bill is currently drafted, that can be done without parliamentary scrutiny. If such subtractions or additions are made, it might seriously affect the ability of a borough such as Lambeth to raise funds and to spend them.

Mr. Holland: I agree with my hon. Friend. One could look at areas with desperate social needs such as homelessness. The propaganda from the Conservative Benches about the number of inner-city boroughs that are providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation to their constituents directly relates to whether it is possible to provide decent alternative housing for them in the inner-city area. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, what happens if the Minister were to deem that it was inappropriate for any borough to spend more than X per cent. on bed-and-breakfast accommodation for more than a given period, without it being possible for us to debate such matters in the House? In Lambeth, homelessness and bed-and-breakfast accommodation went up by over 130 per cent. in 1986 at a time when Lambeth is not open to seek re-determination and when it cannot argue its specific needs to Ministers unless amendments Nos. 19, 20 and 21 can be accepted.

The European Community has precious few clear criteria in any area, but at least, on the use of public funds, articles 85 and 86 stress the importance of transparency. We are not getting from the Bill any transparency in the use of public funds or what may be deemed an authorised expenditure. We had a shambles of a performance from the Minister on Monday. Even when he was in the Committee it was difficult to extract appropriate answers from him. We certainly will not be in a position to extract such answers if we do not have the formula recommended in amendment No. 19 for an annual report to the House or if we cannot get the matters debated in the House through the use of statutory instruments.

I am sure that it will be enlightening for you, Mr. Armstrong, if I talk about the propaganda from the Conservative party in terms of the rates burden breaking the back of businesses. A written answer that I extracted from the Chancellor of the Exchequer shows that rates in this country are less than 1 per cent. of the total cost of industrial enterprise. Of course there is a rates burden. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) was right to say that rates revenue has had to rise to enable councils to offset the cuts in rate support grant and central expenditure. However, to argue that rates alone are penalising the inner city defies imagination when there is a decline in employment and therefore in the taxable base of pay-as-you-earn in the inner cities. More than a third of my constituents living in council housing are drawing supplementary benefit. Those people would be glad to work were it not for the fact that the centre of London has been de-industrialised, compounding the problems facing inner cities.

Mr. Tony Banks: Since my hon. Friend is talking specifically about financial and accountng practices of local authorities, will he say that it is probably true that local authorities have had to get themselves more involved in the special accounting methods so that in certain cases they can do something about rates of interest? Those interest rates are caused directly by Government policy. Surely, in terms of business, the consideration that weighs most heavily is not the rates but the rates of interest. That is entirely within the power to the Government to determine.

Mr. Holland: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point. A definitive study about to be published by Croom Helm on the life and birth of small firms does not stress rates as a problem, but the imposition of interest rates and the high cost of bank lending. Private banks are making a claim on the assets of the enterprise and if a small private firm is in difficulties it could find itself in the hands of the liquidator. More small firms fail than succeed as a result of those policies. That is where the Government have got it wrong, and that is why it is vital that we should have a proper framework for debate of these issues on the Floor of the House.

I hope that the Government will reconsider. I hope that some Conservative Members will be prepared to think again before they make sweeping and uninformed criticisms of local councils such as my own. We can assure them, as they continue to do so, that they write off their support in inner-city areas. What is important is that they should not write off the inner city areas themselves. They cannot close the door on inner cities in such a way. By their high-handed and arrogant action of removing from the House a scrutiny of expenditure they are not only ignoring the problems and the right of elected representatives to address them, but are slamming the door on the inner cities.

There has been a strange change. Earlier today, I was in Birmingham town hall looking at a portrait of Joseph Chamberlain. He would have spun in his grave to see what the Conservative party is doing by undermining the right of local authorities to determine their own expenditure. It is one of the key rights in democratic procedure that those who are taxed have the right to representation. It should also be the case that those who have the right to representation should be able to determine their own level of local taxation. It is certainly the case that they should not be subject to retrospective legislation without any apparent principle. If there is any principle, the Minister should tell us what it is.

The Government get it wrong time and again. They never get it right. It is time they recognised as much and, with a little humility, offered themselves to further scrutiny by the House in the manner proposed by the amendments.

5.30 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The most worrying aspect of this part of the Bill is that it implies that further dictatorial powers will be conferred on the Secretary of State. Clause 1(6)(b) refers to

"any other account specified in respect of the year concerned by the Secretary of State."

Such statements can be found throughout the Bill, and, indeed, this Government's history is riddled with such

statements, giving more powers over local authorities to the Secretary of State for the Environment. The paragraph does not state what account the Secretary of State will specify and when he will do so. Will it be at the beginning of the financial year or halfway through it? Perhaps the Secretary of State will specify something that should be designated as a special account, and local authorities will have to look at their accounts in retrospect rather than for the following year. There is nothing in the Bill to say how the clause will operate in that respect.

The Bill has continued the Government's tradition of centralising powers and weakening local democracy, under which local people can develop their own services and priorities in the way that they think fit. That tendency is dangerous, and threatens the very basis of our democracy, local government. The system of local government was not imposed on the people by Parliament. It was not invented by Parliament. It developed through history out of necessity, although its structure has been altered from time to time by Parliament. The Bill is only the latest example of how Parliament interferes with local democracy. At no time in history has local government been interfered with more than during the term of office of this Government.

It is not often appreciated that local government is older than Parliament itself. Forms of local government can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxons. If one traces the history of local government, one sees that, in Anglo-Saxon times, a "tunscipe" was developed. That was a small community that governed its own affairs. Around that time the "burghs" also developed. Those have become familiar terms today, although the English language is now different. The "tunscipe" has become the "township", the "burgh" has become the "borough" and the robber baron has become the Secretary of State for the Environment. The desire of and need for local communities to develop their own services in their own way and meet local priorities can be traced back long before the history of the House. Thus it should be looked upon with a little more respect than that which the Government accord it. Different conditions in different parts of the country have emerged, so different priorities are perceived by local communities.

We saw how those differences have developed during yesterday's debate on the north-south divide. My constituency of Tyne Bridge has an unemployment rate of about 28 per cent., and the needs and priorities of such a community will be different from those in constituencies represented by Conservative Members.

Local communities must have a right to develop in their own way, but the clause assumes that the Secretary of State knows better than the local councillors who live among the people in the communities, who make demands of the councillors. The Secretary of State knows better than the local treasurers and finance officers, as well as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the local government treasurers' organisation. The Secretary of State and his civil servants are apparently the only people who understand the system. Opposition Members would certainly contest that. It has been evident from the statements made by the Secretary of State himself and his Ministers when discussing the Bill that the right hon. Gentleman and his Ministers, and, indeed, some of their civil servants, do not understand local government finance. Had they understood it, they would not have got into the trouble that they are in today, having to put the law right in retrospect.

The amendments at least give the House of Commons, this elected body, some power to see what the Secretary of State intends to do. They make him accountable to a democratically elected body rather than give him further dictatorial powers.

The Minister for Local Government (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): We have had a fairly wide-ranging debate on the amendments. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is not here. He said that the empty Conservative Benches were symptomatic of possible disinterest. I think that it is a vote of confidence, in that my hon. Friends feel that they can visit their constituents knowing, with a sense of total satisfaction, that the Bill is going through the House so well. If they had all poured in and intervened, that would have been a sign that we were in trouble. From time to time it is nice to see people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), but it is nice to have that total vote of confidence. I am sure that the Opposition Front Bench would like to think the same from time to time, that there was nobody sitting behind them.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) referred to Joseph Chamberlain in the great civic city of Birmingham, and to the history of that city. I do not think that Joseph Chamberlain would have involved himself in creative accountancy, passing bills on to the next generation. That is basically what it is——

Mr. Meadowcroft *rose*——

Dr. Boyson: We shall now hear the authoritative statement from the hon. Gentleman. As with one chief constable, it may be direct from the other world.

Mr. Meadowcroft: It is only from the history books. The Minister must know that one of the things that was deliberately set up in Birmingham for that purpose was a municipal bank, to finance local authority expenditure and avoid the problem of having to go into the ordinary money market.

Dr. Boyson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention, which broadens the debate. I must be careful that I am not tempted to go too far to one side or the other, particularly the Left. There is a difference between selling something one that has and then paying for it over 20 years and banking something that one has and having the interest. There is no comparison. I take as an example the mutual funds of the 19th century—*[Interruption.]* I was linked with a co-operative society—I was a member of its management board before I came to London. That is totally different from selling the furniture. The dividend number was 1723. If anyone returns to that town and puts money into that number, I shall realise that I have the confidence not only of my hon. Friends but of Liberal Members.

I return to the amendment. I sometimes think that Opposition Members are reading into the Bill things that are not there. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had the same experience two days ago when we put a Bill together to deal, in a limited fashion, with a particular problem, at the same time as bringing it into line with the rest of the legislation. Wherever possible, we have kept the situation as it was before. As I said on Monday, as far as

[Dr. Boyson]

possible, local authority accounts will be kept in the way in which the majority of the local authorities have kept them instead of having to turn the system upside down.

The amendments seek to subject to some form of parliamentary control or scrutiny the exercise by my right hon. Friend of his powers to make specifications under clauses 1(6), 2(4), 3(5) and 3(7). Given the matters covered by the specifications, that could be contrary to all precedents under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, and would be an inappropriate use of parliamentary time. Specifications under clause 3(7) on total expenditure marry with the present powers of direction under section 56(8) of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, and specifications under clause 3(4) and (5) are broadly analogous to those on relevant expenditure under section 54(5) of the 1980 Act. Wherever possible, it is in parallel with the previous legislation.

As the Committee will be aware, we are seeking to amend clause 3, but we are proposing to maintain a power of specification on relevant expenditure. Similar specifications to those under clause 1(6) and clause 2(4) are indeed not to be found in the 1980 Act, as they relate to the rate fund revenue account which is a new concept in statute, but as they relate to detailed accounting matters it is entirely appropriate that they should be treated in the same way as the other specifications.

The reports will be laid before the House for approval. They will be supplementary reports, but we cannot deal with them until the Bill becomes an Act. I remind the Committee that before making any specifications my right hon. Friend must consult such local authority associations as appear to him to be concerned and with any local authority with which consultation appears to him to be desirable. It is true that for the rate support grant reports that are to be made immediately after the passing of the Bill we are seeking to have the consultation requirement waived, but we shall still be open to representations on all specifications. The Bill keeps the question of specifications and their laying before Parliament as before, apart from the fact that we have to hurry on this year because the local authorities need their money on 1 April. I am glad that we are making faster progress today than on Monday. Unless the Bill is passed, the local authorities will have no money for the rate support grant on 1 April. That would cause serious problems for local authorities. For this year, therefore, we have to make special arrangements. Consultation has taken place——

Mr. Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Boyson: No, I shall not give way. I must finish my sentence or I may forget what it is and the Committee will be deprived for ever more of this particular thought. No Government have ever before consulted to such an extent before a rate support grant decision has been taken as have this Government. Two consultation documents have been sent out. Moreover, hon. Members have come to see me and other Ministers.

Mr. Straw: The Minister is suggesting that the powers of specification are relatively small. That may or may not be the case, but will he illustrate the kind of specifications that could be made under clause 9? The Minister has the power both to bring things into account and to take them out of account. What kind of things does the Secretary of State have in mind?

Dr. Boyson: I prefer not to deal with that point now. When we consider clause 9 I shall give illustrations of our intentions. I do not want to wander from one clause to another.

5.45 pm

Any exercise by my right hon. Friend of his power to make specifications will be subject to the requirements of the general and administrative law to act reasonably, and it will be reviewable by the courts. That applies equally to the specifications for future years and intermediate years that are made after the passing of the Bill. It applies also to any specifications in the reports and supplementary reports that we are planning to make immediately after the passing of the Bill. For those reasons, I urge the Committee to reject this set of amendments.

Mr. Straw: This has been an entertaining debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) referred to the damage that is being done to his borough by the Government's rate support grant policies, and in an intervention the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) referred to the residence of Members of Parliament. I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friends that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire does not live in Lambeth. According to "Dod's Parliamentary Companion", the hon. Gentleman lives at flat 21, 73 St. James's street, London SW1.

Mr. Heddle: During the last six years I have grown to respect the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for quoting in full anything that he may read out in this place. Will he now tell the Committee precisely what "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" says and not quote selectively from it? Will he read correctly the lines that appear in italics? He had the benefit of a public school education and he then went to a well-known university. He can read. Perhaps he will read those lines in full.

Mr. Straw: I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that I was taught to read some time before I reached the age of 11. I mean to do no injustice to the hon. Gentleman. Therefore, I shall read out the two and a half lines.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Committee has access to "Dod's Parliamentary Companion", if it is interested. However, this exchange shows that my tolerance earlier in the debate was unwise. We ought to return to the amendments.

Mr. Heddle: On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was seeking to answer an earlier intervention by me. May I ask you, Mr. Armstrong, to ask the hon. Member for Blackburn to confirm that "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" also says that my address is 14 The Close, Lichfield, which is in the heart of my Mid-Staffordshire constituency?

The First Deputy Chairman: That is now on the record. I think that we ought now to deal with the amendments.

Mr. Straw: The amendments relate to whether the decision of the Secretary of State on specifications should or should not be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. It is conceivable that the wide power under clause 3 might be used to exclude from account the rate income from 14 The

Close, Lichfield, Staffordshire, or, indeed, from the Carlton club, which is also referred to in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion". Were that to be the case, the Committee would wish closely to scrutinise that decision.

This is a relatively narrow issue: whether the specifications made by the Secretary of State should be subject to scrutiny in this place. The Minister said that such scrutiny would be contrary to all precedents. I accept that it has not been the practice up to now for such specifications to be discussed in this place under the order-making procedure. However, the Minister accepted that there is no detailed definition of a rate fund revenue account in any previous statute, and the Bill is seeking to put into better order the structure of local government finance that was established in 1980. To some extent we are dealing with a future that had no past. This is a complex matter. The powers given by clause 3 in conjunction with clause 9 can be fairly wide. Clause 3(7) gives the Secretary of State power to specify additions to or subtractions from a council's total expenditure for any year. I shall be glad when we debate clause 3 stand part. I accept that the Minister has had no notice of my next point, but perhaps he could give us examples of where such power might be used.

The Minister asks us to take what he says at face value. However reasonable a Minister may seem to us, seven years' experience of ministerial decisions on local government finance do not lead us to believe that local authorities, especially Labour local authorities, are always treated fairly. Let me be blunt. We are suspicious about the way in which the power could be used and think that there ought to be proper provision for scrutiny by the House.

The Minister's last point was that it would be a wrong use of parliamentary time if the specifications were always subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The amendments provide two ways of scrutinising these matters in the House. The first is by the affirmative resolution procedure and the second by negative resolution. If the Minister had been willing to meet us on this we would have been willing to accept that the negative resolution procedure would be appropriate in most cases. I am sorry that he is not prepared to do that and regret that we must press the amendment to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 191, Noes 243.

Division No. 63] **[5.44 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Faichett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shields, Mrs Elizabeth
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe and
Mr. John McWilliam.